Feasibility Study Report:

Exploring the Creation of a New National Center for Choreography In Northeast Ohio

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Table of Contents

Foreword 3

Executive Summary 4

Project Background 7

- History 7
- Blue Ribbon Panel 7

The Feasibility Study Process 9

- Vision/Purpose 10
- Operational Model/Physical Needs 10
- Pilot Residencies/Curatorial Process 11
- Identification and Engagement of Stakeholders 12

Feasibility Study: Preliminary Model & Recommendations 13

- Preliminary Model 13
- Preliminary Recommendations 14

Defining Moment: Knight Foundation Pledge 15

Feasibility Study: Testing the Model 15

- Interviews with National Stakeholders 16
- The Three Pilot Residencies 17

Recommendations for the Future 19

Afterword 24

Appendices 26

Foreword

Pamela Young, Executive Director, DANCECleveland

During a meeting with the Knight Foundation in 2012, I was asked if I had a "big transformational idea" for Akron, which led to a series of conversations about the potential of creating a new national center for choreography in Northeast Ohio. The trajectory of this process included authoring a 1-page concept statement and subsequent white paper, the convening of a Blue Ribbon Panel, the completion of the following feasibility study and, with a press conference announcement in May 2015, the planned start-up of the new **National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron.**

It has been an amazing journey, which began with the seed of an idea and along the way brought in some of the best and brightest people in the national dance community to help inform the process. I humbly acknowledge that none of this would have been possible without all of these bright lights and of the support of two visionary funders. First, to Dennis Scholl and now Victoria Rogers of the Knight Foundation, thank you for seeing the possibility in this idea, pushing us forward, providing funding and encouraging us to keep thinking bigger. Thank you also to Ben Cameron and Cheryl Ikemiya of The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation for supporting the feasibility study process and pilot residencies.

Thank you to Neil Sapienza of The University of Akron, who has shared in every step along the way. To my partners and collaborators Jennifer Calienes and Janus Small, thank you for your wisdom, leadership and willingness to continually adapt to new information and changes as our work progressed. To Christina Thoburn, thank you for joining our team to add your enumerable talent in pulling all of our notes together into a singular voice and cogent report. And finally, a heartfelt thank you to the staff and Board of DANCECleveland, who encouraged me to take on this vision and helped all along the way.

Thank you to the following people for giving us time, candid feedback and encouragement, your advice, suggestions and wisdom are reflected in the following report. Special thanks go to the Blue Ribbon Panelists – Camille A. Brown, Jennifer Calienes, Alex Ketley, Jodee Nimerichter, Julia Rhoads, Neil Sapienza and Douglas Sontag – and to our national advisory committee members Dawn Gibson-Brehon, Gina Gibney, Margaret Jenkins, Dianne McIntyre, Sara Nash, Julia Rhoads and Pamela Tatge. Thank you also to the many people in the local, regional and national dance communities who took time to hear about this idea, give advice and help us identify landmine issues. Thank you to Jonah Bokaer for your thoughts about dance residencies and to the 10 local, regional and national funders who have followed this project.

Thank you to Dr. Scott Scarborough, the new President of The University of Akron, for being open to the idea of having a national center for choreography on the UA campus, which was presented to you before you fully had your feet on the ground in Akron. Your generosity and encouragement were instrumental.

The national dance ecosystem is connected by a very fine thread which, if positively or adversely tugged, can be felt throughout the entire dance community. The diminished resources of time, space and funding available to dance makers has created a ripple effect which has adversely affected their ability to create new work. It is our fondest hope that, with the launch of this new Center for Choreography, a positive tug will begin a new ripple.

Executive Summary

In recent years, the American dance community has experienced diminishing resources of time, space and financial support for the creation of new work. In recognition of this creative crisis, and in response to a query from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation about a "big transformational idea" for Akron, Ohio, DANCECleveland embarked on an invigorating and exhilarating exploration of the possibility of establishing a national center for choreography in Northeast Ohio.

As one of this country's leading presenters of modern and contemporary dance, DANCECleveland was well aware of the challenges facing choreographers nationwide. Its history of commissioning renowned choreographers, success in presenting the world's finest companies, and ongoing partnership with The University of Akron (UA), which has brought leading companies to campus for performances and residencies each year since 2006, made it uniquely qualified to lead this exploratory process.

The concept took flight in October 2013, when DANCECleveland, with funding from the Knight Foundation, convened a group of nationally-recognized dance, arts administration and academic leaders for *Making Dance Work*, a Blue Ribbon Panel at The University of Akron. Through panel discussions, presentations, meetings and informal conversations, the panelists and other participants explored the many issues and benefits related to establishing a center for choreography in Northeast Ohio. In light of the many resources available in the region, the interest in the community and the leadership of a dance presenter, the panel expressed great enthusiasm for the concept and encouraged further study.

Buoyed by the imprimatur of the Blue Ribbon Panel's endorsement, DANCECleveland developed plans for a rigorous feasibility study for a new national center for choreography. It secured generous funding from the Knight Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and launched the study in summer 2014.

The study was led by Pamela Young, Executive Director of DANCECleveland; Janus Small, Principal, Janus Small Associates; and Jennifer Calienes, independent consultant and Founding Director of the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) at Florida State University. Through in-person meetings in Northeast Ohio, especially with the leadership of The University of Akron and dance makers throughout the region, surveys, asset mappings, and extensive conversations with leaders in the national dance community, the Study Team moved forward with its plans for a rigorous study. It articulated a vision and purpose for the proposed center, explored possible operational models, identified physical needs and possible resources to meet those needs, developed a curatorial process that would be used to guide the selection of artists for and the management of the pilot residencies, and created a framework for engaging stakeholders in the process. Through this multi-faceted approach, the Study Team determined that there is a need for a new center for choreography, there are abundant physical resources available in Northeast Ohio to support a center, there is a desire for it to be located in Northeast Ohio, and there is an interest in the national funding community to support such a center.

All of these efforts and findings came together in a vision and preliminary recommendation for an operating model for a center of choreography as follows:

Vision:
We envision a Northeast Ohio National Center for Choreography that will support the research and development of new work in dance by:

- *Exploring the full potential of the creative process in dance and all its forms*
- *Serving as a catalyst for artistic, cultural and community advancement and enrichment*
- *Strengthening the national dance ecosystem as an anchor development space for dance*

Operating model:
The proposed center should be a separate 501(c)(3) organization housed at The University of Akron, where students and faculty will benefit from the presence of inspired choreographers and their talented companies, and residency artists will benefit from access to the University's world-class dance facilities. Over time, it should host at least six residencies per year by choreographers selected through a clearly defined and thoughtful process.

The recommended model and other preliminary recommendations were shared with the funders; they subsequently became the basis of an agreement with UA to house a New National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron.

In March 2015, after receiving the preliminary work of the Feasibility Study, the Knight Foundation made the unexpected announcement that it would support the formation of a National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron with a fund of $5 million to be established over five years. This made the concept both feasible and sustainable, and shifted the study's focus from "Could it be possible?" to "What is the best way to proceed?" Basic organizational matters, including filing for nonprofit status, finalizing a MOU between UA and the Center, and establishing a Board of Directors were completed in quick succession, and a press conference announcing the establishment of the Center and the Knight Foundation's support was held at UA in May 2015.

The study then moved into the testing phase, during which the viability of the proposed model was assessed through interviews with national stakeholders and the hosting of three pilot residencies. Through a virtual meeting of the National Advisory Committee and a series of one-on-one interviews with a broader group of national dance leaders, the Study Team received valuable observations, suggestions and cautionary comments that informed their final recommendations.

The Pilot Residencies tested the curatorial selection process as well as the more tangible aspects of managing the residencies. Using the selection process outlined in the preliminary curatorial process, Carrie Hanson (founder/Artistic Director of The Seldoms in Chicago) and John Jasperse (founder and Artistic Director of Thin Man Dance in New York City) were selected for pilot residencies in summer

2015. In addition, two stages of a creative residency by Camille A. Brown and Dancers that was funded by the Joyce Foundation were hosted in summer 2014 and January 2015 as part of the Feasibility Study.

Each residency was evaluated by the participating artists and staff through interviews, informal conversations and written comments. While generally very positive, the evaluations provided valuable suggestions for future residencies.

As the pilot residencies and the preliminary organizational efforts concluded, the Study Team made its final recommendations, which focus on Vision, Curatorial Focus, Stakeholders and Potential Stakeholders, Governance, Staffing, Space and Start-up Processes. Incorporating the findings from the study, the interviews and the pilot residencies, they form a firm basis upon which the National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron can move forward. And in doing so, they will foster the development of a Center that truly addresses the national dance community's need for choreographic support. As said in *Mind The Gap: Artist Residencies and Dance*, the report prepared by the Alliance of Artists Communities in 2011, "...If dance is to flourish, it is essential that the field of residencies provide greater opportunities and resources for the development of new dance." The new National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron, with its bold vision, thoughtful plans, access to world-class facilities and significant start-up funding, is uniquely positioned to provide those badly-needed "greater opportunities and resources for the development of new dance."

Feasibility Study Report:

Exploring the Creation of a New National Center for Choreography in Northeast Ohio

Project Background

History

In recent years, the American dance community has been faced with pressing needs for time, space and financial resources to support the creation of new work. With only one National Center for Choreography in the United States, the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) at Florida State University, opportunities available to American dance makers are often limited in scope, highly competitive, and underfunded. As articulated in *Mind The Gap: Artist Residencies and Dance*, the report prepared by the Alliance of Artists Communities in 2011, "Support for the creation of new dance is, by many accounts, in crisis. Dancemakers note a lack of adequate time and resources to develop new work, a shortage of suitable space, and dwindling audiences that understand and appreciate contemporary dance. Without the support and resources to fully develop new work the work itself suffers, further diminishing audiences for dance and perpetuating a cycle of decline...If dance is to flourish, it is essential that the field of residencies provide greater opportunities and resources for the development of new dance."

To address this need for multi-faceted support for the creation of new work, Pamela Young, Executive Director of DANCECleveland, one of this country's leading presenters of modern and contemporary dance, has long believed that Akron and the Northeast Ohio region (Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown) could be a tremendous location for a new National Center for Choreography. The idea began in 2006, when The University of Akron (UA) opened its state-of-the-art dance facility with eight dance studios and a black-box theater in close proximity to the 3,000-seat E. J. Thomas Hall. This led to a series of collaborations between the University and DANCECleveland, which have brought nationally-renowned contemporary dance companies to Akron each fall for one-week educational/community residencies and public performances. With the University's remarkable space as the catalyst, and the DANCECleveland/UA partnership firmly in place, the idea for the creation of a new National Center for Choreography took root.

Blue Ribbon Panel

In October 2013, DANCECleveland, with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, took the first step in exploring the potential and appetite for a National Center for Choreography in Northeast Ohio when it convened a group of nationally-recognized dance, arts administration and academic leaders for a Blue Ribbon Panel, *Making Dance Work*, at The University of Akron. The purposes of this Panel were (1) to provide a venerable think tank of Blue Ribbon panelists with information and tools for assessing critical factors that would need to be met before proceeding forward with this major effort,

and (2) to host a public event to engage the community in a conversation about the creation of dance and the impact a National Center for Choreography could have on the local, regional and national dance ecosystems. Panelists included Douglas Sonntag, Director of Dance at the National Endowment for the Arts (DC); Jodee Nimerichter, Director of The American Dance Festival (NC); Jennifer Calienes, Founding Director of MANCC (FL); Camille A. Brown, Artistic Director of Camille A. Brown & Dancers (NY); Alex Ketley, Artistic Director of The Foundry (CA); Julia Rhoads, Founding Artistic Director of Lucky Plush Productions (IL); and Neil Sapienza, Associate Dean, UA College of the Arts. As part of the Blue Ribbon Panel process, the panel coordinators (Pamela Young and consultants Jennifer Calienes and Janus Small) also met with other stakeholder groups, including local funders, local/regional dance companies and the top UA administration, to gauge interest and seek advice.

The panelists all cited a strong need for such a center. As passionately noted by Douglas Sonntag: "historically, American dance has had a full and rich continuum that like so much of American culture, is balanced uneasily between art and commerce; high art and popular art; subtlety and high-octane spectacle." But, he said, so much is changing so fast, much of the American arts world, especially dance, is falling behind. "One of the weightiest challenges for the field of dance is to answer the question, 'where and how will the dances of tomorrow be developed?' Finding the answer to that question is becoming increasingly urgent."

The Blue Ribbon Panelists discussed how residency programs can benefit both the artists who are creating new work and the community or university in which that work is being created. They mentioned the alignment as well as the divergence between the needs of choreographers and the offerings of academic settings, which called into question the initial assumption that the proposed center would be a Center of Excellence at UA. The participants expressed the importance of having access to experts outside of the dance field, available space and unscheduled time to explore and even to fail while attempting to create new work. They also described various scenarios and operational models within which a choreographic center could operate, and encouraged further study of the possibilities. Finally, in light of the many resources available in the Northeast Ohio region, the interest in the community and the leadership of a dance presenter, the panel expressed great enthusiasm about the prospect of establishing a National Center for Choreography in Northeast Ohio. (See Appendix A for the Executive Summary of the Blue Ribbon Panel.)

After receiving overwhelmingly positive responses from the Blue Ribbon Panelists, UA leadership and faculty, and participating community members, DANCECleveland launched the next step in this process, which was to secure funding to conduct a full feasibility study, develop a model for a new National Center for Choreography and host three pilot residencies. In spring 2014, it received grants from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to support the Feasibility Study.

The Feasibility Study Process

The Feasibility Study was launched in summer 2014 by a Study Team comprised of three highly experienced arts leaders/consultants with complementary areas of expertise:

- Pamela Young, Executive Director of DANCECleveland
- Janus Small, independent consultant and Principal, Janus Small Associates, and
- Jennifer Calienes, independent consultant and MANCC Founding Director and Senior Advisor

In summer 2015, Christina Thoburn, independent arts management consultant, joined the team to assist with the final recommendations and report. (See biographies in Appendix B.)

During an intensive retreat, the Study Team finalized plans for a rigorous study. At the outset, they agreed that the purpose of the proposed Center would be to create an environment that would support dance-makers in the creation of new work by giving them space, time and resources (funding, housing, production assistance, etc.) to research and explore new artistic concepts. They also identified four key areas around which the study would be structured:

- **Vision/Purpose**. What is the long-term vision for a Center for Choreography?
- **Operational Model/Physical Needs**. What Operational Model would best support a Center for Choreography? What physical needs would be required to fulfill the vision? And what resources would be available in Northeast Ohio, and The University of Akron in particular, to fulfill those needs?
- **Pilot Residencies/Curatorial Process**. How would artists be selected for pilot residencies? And how would the residencies best be structured to ensure that the needs of the artists were met and to test structural and programmatic priorities? How would the residencies and host partners' experiences be evaluated?
- **Identification and Engagement of Stakeholders**. Who could be called upon for advice? Which dance makers, presenters, residency sites, educators, community leaders and funders – nationally, regionally, and locally – could be contacted to make sure multiple viewpoints would be represented in the planning and decision-making processes? What role would they play?

In addition, they acknowledged that key to the entire study process was to determine The University of Akron's (UA) interest in housing the Center, as that determination could affect the Center's operating structure, setting and availability of resources. Finally, the Study Team members decided that, while there was considerable overlap in the study areas outlined above, they would divide their primary responsibilities as follows:

- Pam Young would provide overall coordination of the study, lead the vision discussions and oversee the implementation of the pilot residencies
- Janus Small would focus on the local/regional conversations, including facilitation of meetings with UA leadership, and the local and regional asset mapping

- Jennifer Calienes would focus on all national conversations, including those with the national advisory committee, and the development of the curatorial process and pilot residencies

They also agreed that they would work collaboratively on finalizing operating, governance and budget recommendations for the Center. In fall 2014, the Study Team began in-depth discussions with the UA leadership while also moving forward in each of these discrete but interrelated areas.

Vision/Purpose

Through extensive conversations with dance-makers, presenters, UA faculty and leadership, and leaders of other creative centers, the following vision for the proposed Center for Choreography in Northeast Ohio evolved:

> *We envision a Northeast Ohio National Center for Choreography that will support the research and development of new work in dance by:*
>
> - *Exploring the full potential of the creative process in dance and all its forms*
> - *Serving as a catalyst for artistic, cultural and community advancement and enrichment*
> - *Strengthening the national dance ecosystem as an anchor development space for dance*
>
> *Dedicated to the highest level of excellence, the new Center will have a profound impact on the national ecosystem for dance while at the same time strongly advancing the cultural life of Akron and its surrounding communities.*

Operational Model/Physical Needs

The Operational Model/Physical Needs component explored possible structures for the Center, including various operational relationships with the University, the logistical and space needs of a potential Center, and an assessment of the availability of resources to fill those needs. The process began with a series of in-depth meetings over a six month period with UA leadership, which included the Provost, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Associate Dean for Arts and other top leadership, to assess the University's interest in and ability to house a National Center for Choreography. These explored ways the University and its students could benefit from the presence of a Center for Choreography on its campus as well as its willingness and ability to provide preferred access to dance studios, office space, production assistance and other in-kind services. The preliminary lists of benefits and organizational needs formed the basis upon which the initial model evolved. They included the following:

Benefits:

1. Build on the strength of the UA dance program to give UA a national presence
2. Enhance the national profile of UA in the arts overall
3. Bolster UA's role as a regional resource for the dance community
4. Position UA as a regional force that catapults UA to a national stage
5. Attract higher caliber of dance students at UA

6. Attract higher caliber of dance faculty at UA
7. Set the stage for there to be a strong, integrated connection between the Center and UA dance program and other UA academic programs
8. Build bridges between the Center and academic programs so academic programs can benefit from the Center
9. Offer an opportunity to have the director of the Center be a faculty member at UA, which could be a great positive for the dance program
10. Provide great opportunity for co-branding – the Center and UA
11. Support broader community engagement opportunities for UA

Organizational and physical needs:

1. Salary and benefits for primary staff inclusive of a Director and Residency Coordinator
2. Access to secondary personnel, inclusive of faculty, staff and production crew to support Center activities including technical support and event management
3. Prioritized access to one or more dance studios, black box or theater with a dance floor, lighting grid, sound system and video capability
4. Access to administrative office(s), costume/scenery workspace, locker or dressing rooms and kitchen facilities
5. Support for fundraising, finance and administration, marketing and public relation efforts
6. Baseline administrative, travel and/or programming resources for Center operations

This component also included a scan of local and regional arts and community facilities to identify possible studio, rehearsal and performance spaces that could be utilized by visiting artists (see Appendix C: Facilities Survey, and Appendix D: Sample Facilities Inventory Reports). Finally, the Study Team explored possible lodging and transportation options in which to house and transport visiting choreographers and dancers (see Appendix E: NCC Housing Inventory Form).

Pilot Residencies/Curatorial Process

The Pilot Residencies/Curatorial Process component focused on the impact a Center for Choreography could have on the national dance ecosystem as well as the planning for and implementation of a series of three pilot residencies. The goals for the pilot residencies were identified, which were to:

- Provide case studies in which to explore and test potential operational models for the Center
- Devise and test potential curatorial approach strategies to inform artist selection process
- Provide hands-on experience for potential local partners to host and assess their readiness to host national dance developmental residencies

The objectives (*i.e.* rationale) for hosting the residencies were to:

- Provide support for nationally significant choreographers as determined by grants, awards, touring activity or peer review;

- Reflect a diverse group of choreographers and collaborating artists inclusive of geography, artistry, aesthetics, age and ethnicity;
- Represent – as a whole – a range of support for the developmental process from early-stage, mid-stage, late-stage and/or post premiere;
- Engage with community in ways that exemplify what creative research, practice and/or process in dance can entail that will engage community and advance an artist's research, such as (pulled from Blue Ribbon Panel):
    a. meeting with scholars, scientists or other specialists
    b. experiential based research
    c. movement investigations
    d. text, sound, conceptual research
    e. lighting, set or production components
- Serve as a catalyst for community dialog.

The goals and objectives were summarized in a Pilot Residency Overview, which also articulated a Curatorial Approach, application process and suggested selection procedure. (The complete Overview is included in Appendix F.)

Identification and Engagement of Stakeholders

Accompanying all of the above were the identification and engagement of myriad stakeholders – national, regional and local – who were contacted as plans evolved and asked for input and advice. At both the national and the local/regional levels, people were identified could be (1) interviewed for advice and input and/or (2) eventually invited to join an Advisory Board.

On the local/regional level, 19 people, including local dance makers; artistic directors; arts administrators; selected dance, music and art faculty from UA; production specialists; and UA dance students were interviewed. Key themes surfacing from the interviews included:

- Very supportive and excited about the concept and what it could mean for UA, its students and faculty. The interviewees believed the Center would help UA attract a higher caliber of students and faculty, offer unparalleled opportunities for students and faculty to interact with visiting artists, and enhance the University's outreach into the community.
- Very supportive and excited about the concept and what it could mean for Akron. The interviewees saw the presence of the Center as a way to boost Akron's reputation as a "hip" city, which would help attract and retain residents and be of value to corporate recruiters. They also saw it as a means to elevate the view and purpose of dance within the local community.

The interviewees also asked questions and expressed concerns around roles and relationships, especially with the University, limited resources, opportunities for local choreographers, potential competition for local funding, and impact on audience-building for local dance companies. Finally, as

part of this process, a list of nine potential Local Advisory Committee members was developed for future consideration. (See Appendix G for a summary of the Northeast Ohio interviews.)

On the national level, an extensive list of individuals representative of the national dance field (artists, funders, presenters, representatives of residency centers, educators, managers, agents and policy makers) who could be contacted for input and advice at the appropriate time was compiled. In addition, a National Advisory Committee was established to provide guidance on a longer-term basis. Members include:

- Dawn Gibson-Brehon– Consultant, faculty at SUNY Purchase and former Executive Director of Ronald K. Brown/Evidence (CT)
- Gina Gibney – founder and Artistic Director of Gibney Dance Center (NYC, formerly an Ohio resident)
- Margaret Jenkins – Artistic Director of Margaret Jenkins Dance Company and founder of CHIME (Choreographers in Mentorship Exchange) and National Dance Lab (CA)
- Dianne McIntyre – choreographer/director/mentor and a leader in the introduction of avant garde dance expressions into the Black/social consciousness themes of the 1970's (OH)
- Sara Nash – Manager of the National Dance Project at the New England Foundation for the Arts (MA)
- Julia Rhoads – founding Artistic Director of Lucky Plush Productions (IL)
- Pamela Tatge – Director of the Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University (CT)

The committee description and full biographies are included in Appendices H and I. While there were no formal interviews or meetings during this phase, representatives of the national dance community were often contacted for informal conversations and advice.

Feasibility Study: Preliminary Model & Recommendations

Preliminary Model

Through all of the discussions and investigations above, especially conversations with the UA leadership, a preliminary model for a National Center for Choreography emerged. Starting with core premises that a national center would need certain things, that there were multiple ways a center could be structured (independent non-profit vs. university-based program vs. program within another non-profit, among others), and that a university could benefit from the presence of a center on its campus, the Study Team and UA leadership and faculty explored and assessed options. Eventually, a preliminary model for the structure of the Center emerged that could be tested through additional interviews with the stakeholders mentioned above. The model articulated the specific ways in which a Center could enhance the University, remain nimble in order to be responsive to the field of dance and be self-sustaining. It included the following elements:

- Setting (will be housed at UA and be a separate 501(c)(3) organization)

- Governance (Director will report to the Center's Board of Directors)
- Director's responsibilities (general administration, artistic leadership and coordination, fundraising, community engagement)
- Curatorial and selection processes for residencies (to be led by the Director with input from a National panel, UA dance faculty, and DANCECleveland)
- Artist engagement opportunities (including those with UA students, faculty and staff; other regional dance program participants; and the community at large)
- Co-branding opportunities (name will include UA)
- In-kind support from UA (to include rehearsal, office and performance space; costume, scenery and production support; and access to possible marketing, event management and student volunteer assistance)
- Initial annual operating budget projection ($367,950)

(Please see Appendix J for complete document.)

Preliminary Recommendations

In Winter 2015, guided by a rigorous and thoughtful study that included information gathered during the Blue Ribbon Panel process; discussions with and information provided by national, local and regional research interviews; and through the feasibility study process, the Study Team summarized its findings as follows:

- There is a need for a new center for choreography to be established to help advance the artform of dance and be an incubator site for the creation of new work,
- There are an abundance of dance studio and other needed spaces, research facilities and cultural assets existing in the region that have capacity to support a new Center,
- There is an opportunity and a desire for it to be located in Northeast Ohio – and more specifically at The University of Akron, and
- There is an appetite and interest by the national funding community to support the creation process for new works in dance and an interest in the possibility of a new center for choreography

The Study Team went on to develop a series of preliminary recommendations that addressed the Center's structure, location, curatorial focus, programs, and approach to operations and community engagement. Of greatest and most immediate importance were the recommendations that the Center:

- Operate as a stand-alone non-profit organization, established under the laws of the State of Ohio and be responsible for its own programming choices, fundraising and staffing; and

- Be housed at The University of Akron's School of Dance Theater and Arts Administration, which has seven state-of-the-art dance studios, with a lease agreement that will safeguard the Center from administrative and operational changes at the University;

The model and preliminary recommendations were shared with the funders. Subsequently, they became the basis of an agreement with UA to house a new National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron.

Defining Moment: Knight Foundation Pledge

The operating model that had been defined during the Feasibility Study, which included six (6) residencies per year, became both feasible and sustainable in March 2015 with the unexpected announcement by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation that it would support the formation of a National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron. The Foundation pledged to establish a fund of $5 million for the Center to be fulfilled over five years and managed by the Foundation dependent on the following:

- An independent 501(c)(3) would be established for a new National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron;
- A Memo of Understanding (MOU) would be finalized between the University and the new organization (represented by the Study Team);
- The Study Team and UA leadership would prepare for a public announcement of the Knight Foundation's pledge and the establishment of the Center in May 2015.

This decision accelerated the pace of the organizational development efforts and altered the study's focus from "Could it be possible?" to "What is needed? And what is the best way to proceed?" In rapid order, the filings for an independent 501(c)(3) were completed, a MOU between the University and the Center was drafted and signed, and plans were made for a public announcement of the establishment of the Center and the Knight Foundation's support. A founding Board of Directors was established with two members elected by the Board of The University of Akron, two members elected by the Board of DANCECleveland and one member elected by the Knight Foundation. (See Appendix K for list of Board members and officers.) A press conference was held on May 14, 2015 at the University.

Feasibility Study: Testing the Model

Following the Knight Foundation's decision and subsequent completion of the legal documentation, the Study Team moved into a testing phase to assess the viability of its plans, identify potential pitfalls and seek additional national input to be used by the incoming Center staff and board to inform curatorial focus and programming. The phase included:

- Interviews with national stakeholders to gain insight and identify opportunities to pursue and landmines to avoid in future operations and programs;
- Planning and implementation of the Pilot Residencies as a way to test the structural components of the Center.

Interviews with National Stakeholders

The first step in engaging national stakeholders was to convene the National Advisory Committee, which held a virtual meeting in April 2015. During the meeting, as well as in additional one-on-one conversations, the members discussed a variety of issues, especially those focused on residency programs within academic institutions. The meeting was followed by a series of one-on-one interviews with a broader group of leaders in the national dance field in June 2015. The National Advisory Committee and interviewees offered valuable observations, suggestions and cautionary comments, which fell into four categories:

General

- Do something that is not being done anywhere else, by anyone else.
- Define the demographic and geographic reach of the Center through focused programming and strategic alignments.
- Don't use Northeast Ohio in the Center name without clarifying what this means in relationship to visiting artists and the adjacent community.

University Specific

- Access to the field is essential for the growth of the form. A student cannot learn dance entirely from reading a textbook or watching a video.....the multiplicity of opportunities [offered by this Center] is even more essential.
- This Center is an opportunity for the field and campus to return to early ideas of the academy as a laboratory where dance- and art-making live alongside other pursuits, fueled by artists who are alive and working outside of academia.
- Involve the University of Akron dance faculty in a way that elevates their own professional development and regional and national perspective of the field
- It may take time for the Director and Center to forge a relationship with the University.
- Set realistic development expectations.

Operational

- Clarify the relationship between the Center and DANCECleveland. As one of the few dance-only presenters in the United States, there is a unique opportunity to capitalize on this relationship and expand the local, regional and national footprint of the Center.
- The Center must have a focal point of leadership in advance of its first Director hire.
- Conduct a rigorous national search for the first Director, who must be connected to networks of funding opportunities, curatorial peers and have some experience in the academy.
- The Center must find ways to work in partnership with regional (broadly defined) colleges and universities as well as regional presenters.

Programmatic

- Programming should take into consideration peer-to-peer exchange, mentorship and reflection as a commitment to an evolving practice.
- Programming should consider how the studio, research and development of dance as a human art form connects to civic life.
- Avoid aesthetic judgment too early in the practice especially when using an application process.
- Consider making exclusive commitment to a group of artists over multiple years ... and then sit down with the target population ... Get a discourse going that could benefit everyone in the field.

The comments were overwhelmingly positive and supportive, with repeated offers of assistance. The complete summary is included in Appendix L.

The Three Pilot Residencies

When the Feasibility Study was first designed, the pilot residencies were envisioned as an integral step in building a detailed understanding about the curatorial and selection process, identifying the core competencies that might be required to manage the residencies, gauging the effectiveness of potential dance studio(s) and other work spaces, and assessing housing and hospitality options for visiting artists. With the announcement by the Knight Foundation to support the new Center and The University of Akron's stated desire to house the Center on its campus, the pilot residencies took on more specific goals related to operating within the UA structure: how to set up pathways of communication, the specifics of all of the spaces that might be available for the Center's use (including lighting, sound and video equipment), and how to navigate the approval process for everything from parking passes to room temperature control to access to campus exercise facilities for the visiting artists.

In selecting the residency artists, it was decided to host three residencies that encompassed the full spectrum of the creative development process: early-stage, mid-stage and late-stage. Using the curatorial process that had been developed prior to the Knight Foundation's announcement, the selection process began in fall 2014 with the identification of a pool of top residency candidates based on recommendations from national colleagues and a scan of recent fellows, residency artists at other programs, and grantees/award recipients from national funders. The top candidates were contacted to discuss his/her current work and interest in participating; the attached description of the Pilot Residency Program with application information (Appendix M) was then sent to a smaller group of four choreographers. Following an intensive review, evaluation and panel process, Carrie Hanson (founder/Artistic Director of The Seldoms in Chicago) and John Jasperse (founder and Artistic Director of Thin Man Dance in New York City) were selected for pilot residencies. In addition, two stages of a creative residency by Camille A. Brown and Dancers that was funded by the Joyce Foundation were hosted in summer 2014 and January 2015 as part of the Feasibility Study.

The residencies, which actually took place in reverse order of their creative stages, fostered the creation of three new works while serving as laboratories in which to test the curatorial and operating model. Details of the residencies are as follows:

Camille A. Brown was in Northeast Ohio June 8-13, 2014 and January 24-26, 2015 to develop *Black Girl: Linguistic Play*, a new work commissioned by DANCECleveland with funding from the Joyce Foundation. DANCECleveland presented the new work on November 14, 2015 at the Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square in Cleveland Ohio, as part of its 2015-16 season.

In June 2014, Brown worked in partnership with DC to conduct early research for the new work and reflect with others on "the complexity of carving out a self-defined identity as a black female in urban American culture." Brown and her mother traveled to Cleveland to meet with and interview African American "elders and their mothers," local scholars from Case Western Reserve University and a selected group of young college students of color at Cuyahoga Community College. Brown also met with incarcerated women at the Northeast Reintegration Center in Cleveland, which is a minimum security prison facility. These interviews were videotaped so that she could share the stories she heard and experiences she had with her dancers and creative team.

In January 2015, Brown's residency was timed to align with the International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) annual conference in Cleveland. While in residence with her New York-based performers and musicians, Brown rehearsed the new work, performed a segment of the work-in-progress to a sold out audience as part of the IABD conference performances (which also featured other regional and national artists), and held a discussion and feed-back session with a group of women who were part of her initial residency. The Company and musicians also returned to the NEO Reintegration Center to perform the work and have a feed-back discussion session with the residents.

Carrie Hanson was at The University of Akron July 19-28, 2015 for a mid-stage development and production residency for *RockCitizen*, a companion piece to the her 2014 National Dance Project supported work *Power Goes*. Hanson was in residence with her Chicago-based performers Philip Elson, Mathew McMunn, Damon Green, Christina Gonzalez-Gillett and Lighting Designer Julie Ballard. She utilized her time in residence to develop the choreographic structure of the new work in relationship to core thematic content (the impact and legacy of the 1960s counterculture), and – with her collaborators – conducted site-based research at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and Kent State University's May 4 Memorial. Hanson worked with a local production crew to develop and refine a large-scale backdrop and explore how the performers and set could best intersect with one another.

John Jasperse was in residence at UA August 2-14, 2015 for an early development residency for *Remains*, a Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) commission that will premiere in 2016 at the

American Dance Festival. Jasperse used his time at UA to begin developing choreographic structures for the new work with New York-based performers Maggie Cloud, Burr Johnson, Stuart Singer and Claire Westby. While in residence, he experimented with early ideas for visual design elements ("archival visual fragments") that included working with various objects and approaches to screen-based imagery. Jasperse opened up a work-in-progress showing to UA Dance Institute high school and college aged students, shared insights as to his working process and the new work, the value of having been given this residency and practical information about being a dance maker in New York. Jasperse also shared the work-in-progress with the Feasibility Study Team alongside reflections and dialog at the close of the residency.

For all of the residencies, DC Executive Director Pamela Young was the primary contact for all preparations including confirmation of the overall residency scope, dates, budget, space needs and contractual agreements. Young and her staff made all housing and travel arrangements, coordinated all community engagement and research initiatives, hired all support personnel, processed all direct expenses and were on call for the duration of the residency. For the Hanson and Jasperse residencies, DC engaged local independent stage and production manager Sarah Stewart to assist several weeks in advance of the residencies to confirm facility usage and production needs, map a timeline of residency activities and be available at all times to the visiting artists. DC also hired two production assistants to help on the first and last day of the residencies, and engaged a UA grad student for 20 hours/week to provide overall support and chronical the experience. Finally, PR consultant Barr Communications was hired to publicize the residencies, which led to strong coverage in the regional media. (See Appendices for a link to media coverage.)

Each residency was evaluated by the participating artists and staff personnel through interviews, informal conversations and written comments. The assessment process covered topics ranging from the application process to facilities to general comments and wish lists. While generally very positive, the evaluations provided valuable suggestions for future residencies. (See Appendix N for the evaluation questions and Appendix O for a summary of the comments and suggestions.)

Following the three pilot residencies, and with input gained through the national interviews, the Preliminary Model and Budget were revised to reflect the outcomes of the assessments.

Recommendations for the Future

The recommendations of the Study Team evolved in two distinct but overlapping phases: the Preliminary Recommendations, which were identified through extensive local/regional research and meetings, especially with UA leadership, and a set of Concluding Recommendations, which were articulated after the model had been tested through national stakeholder interviews and the implementation of the pilot residencies. It was the intention of the Study Team that these

recommendations provide a context for the Center, be based upon the information gathered from myriad sources, and set the foundation upon which the Center can be established and thrive.

All of the recommendations, both preliminary and concluding, were formulated to create a basis upon which the proposed Center could realize the vision that evolved during the Feasibility Study process:

We envision a Northeast Ohio National Center for Choreography that will support the research and development of new work in dance by:

- *Exploring the full potential of the creative process in dance and all its forms*
- *Serving as a catalyst for artistic, cultural and community advancement and enrichment*
- *Strengthening the national dance ecosystem as an anchor development space for dance*

Dedicated to the highest level of excellence, the new Center will have a profound impact on the national ecosystem for dance while at the same time strongly advancing the cultural life of Akron and its surrounding communities.

The **Preliminary Recommendations**, prepared prior to the Knight Foundation's decision to provide significant funding, focused on the proposed Center's legal and operational structure and also set the stage for its future artistic programs. Developed in February 2015 and on schedule to be completed by January 2016, the Preliminary Recommendations were that the Center should:

- Operate as a stand-alone non-profit organization, established under the laws of the State of Ohio and be responsible for its own programming choices, fundraising and staffing;
- Be housed at The University of Akron's School of Dance Theater and Arts Administration with a lease agreement that will safeguard the Center from administrative and operational changes at the University;
- Have a defined and contractual relationship with UA regarding space, technology resources, production space, equipment usage, parking, etc.;
- Have a solid understanding of intersecting and overlapping areas of interest between the Center and UA, such as fundraising, marketing, etc.;
- The Center should seek equitable and inclusive participation in consideration of Stakeholders, Governance and Staffing, especially from historically underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds;
- Establish a founding Board of Directors with two members elected by the Board of The University of Akron, two members elected by the Board of DANCECleveland and one member elected by the Knight Foundation (see Appendix K for Founding Board and officers).

Programmatically, the Study Team also recommended that the Center:

- Be a dance residency site that will offer unencumbered space, time and funding to support the creative dance making process in all stages of work and artistic expression;
- Launch with six project based residencies per year with the intent that other types and numbers of residencies will be added to the Center's programming in the future;

- Be able to make important connections with local, regional and national dancers and dance students and create opportunities for interaction with the residency choreographers;
- Remain nimble in its operations and programming so as to be able to reflect and respond to formal and contextual changes in the field
- Maintain a focus on artistic research, practice and process;
- Partner with other residency sites in the United States to foster a culture that values creativity and embraces dance making in all of its forms.

The **Concluding Recommendations** were developed in fall 2015 following extensive interviews with national stakeholders and the implementation of three pilot residencies, which took place between June 2014 and August 2015. Focusing on Vision, Curatorial Focus, Stakeholders and Potential Stakeholders, Governance, Staffing, Space, and Start-up Processes, they incorporate the findings from the interviews and pilot residencies and include:

Vision

The first Director should initiate a strategic planning process within the first 18 months of operations to advance the principles of the founding vision, hone the mission and core values of the Center and determine programmatic priorities for the first five years.

Curatorial Focus

- The curatorial focus of the Center should be considered in relationship to the local, regional and national focal points for the center, and
- Programming should take into consideration both the advancement of dance and all its forms and the strategic development of the region's appetite for dance and its evolution.

Stakeholders and Potential Stakeholders

- The Center leadership should develop synergistic relationships with local, regional and national dance communities;
- The Center team should work continually to strengthen relationships with UA faculty, staff and students and assist in educating and expanding their view of dance and all its forms;
- The Center should formalize its relationship with DANCECleveland staff as both a resource for professional development for residency artists and as a presenter;
- The Center should serve as a catalyst for dance makers regionally and nationally and, in doing so, must work in partnership with regional and national presenters (in the broadest sense), funders, universities and dance development programs;
- The Center should take a leadership role in establishing alignments and partnerships with other national dance residency centers including the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography and the American Dance Institute and with national service organizations including the Alliance of Artists Communities to strengthen the national ecosystem for the support of dance makers.

- The Center should seek partners to assist with documentation and dissemination efforts of both the development of the Center as a model for the field and the development of artistic work and practice at the Center.

Governance

The Board be should expanded from the Founding Board of five to an Operating Board of nine. Retaining the make-up of the Founding Board as the basis of the Board, the additional four members should:

- Reflect the community and dance makers the Center aims to serve.
- Have core competencies that are needed to operate effectively (national perspective, dance focused, legal and financial expertise, etc.).

Staffing

Staff should be comprised of three staff members, with additional work out-sourced to contractors as needed. Those staff positions would be as follows:

1. Executive Director (full-time): A national leader in the field of dance with significant and working experience in non-profit management and fundraising, ideally with experience working in higher education and in support of dance residencies, the Executive Director will be responsible for maintaining the highest standards of artistic excellence while supporting the organization's mission. He or she will be a non-voting member of the Board and will serve at the pleasure of the Board. The Executive Director will be the Center's representative to the national dance and funding communities and will oversee all activities of the center.
2. Administrative Coordinator (full-time): This person will coordinate all office and administrative functions; be a partner, in concert with the other staff, during creative residencies to ensure positive artist experiences and alignment of residency artists with other disciplines and research opportunities; help with grants management; and assist with the coordination of the curatorial process, among other things. The Administrator Coordinator should have, or be willing and able to develop, a strong understanding of the protocols at The University of Akron and have knowledge of the people and organizations in the broader community.
3. Production/Project Coordinator (part-time): The Production/Project Coordinator will be the project manager for the residencies. He/she will advance the production needs ahead of the residencies, coordinate travel and housing for the artists and respond to the artists' production-oriented evolving needs and ideas. This person should have an extensive background in coordinating and executing the logistics and production requirements for dance, including lighting, sound and technology needs. The hourly requirements will depend upon the residency schedules and will generally range between 24 and 40 hours per week.

Specialized administrative functions should be outsourced to contractors or professional firms with expertise in the following areas:

- Financial: monthly financial reporting and annual audit services

- Communications: public relations, branding-graphic design, website design and maintenance
- Computer: equipment maintenance and services
- Production: experienced theater production staff, video recording services and technology services as required for creative residencies

Finally, with a strong graduate program in Arts Administration at The University of Akron, it is recommended that at least one Graduate Student each semester provide approximately 10 hours per week to the Center to assist in administrative work, residency production, event management, social media communications, data management, etc.

Space

Office Space

- The space should include office space for at least three people, meeting space, work area (copy, mailing, etc.) and storage and be located altogether in one space; and
- The office should be in proximity to the facilities utilized by visiting artists and to the UA dance department and dance faculty to enhance cooperation and collaboration.

Dance Studio

- The Center was guaranteed prioritized access to a dance studio. The lease agreement must outline the specifics for this arrangement and must include secure access procedures for visiting artists.

Black Box and/or Theater Spaces

- The Center was guaranteed access to UA theater spaces with production capabilities. The lease agreement must outline the specifics for this arrangement and must include secure access and use procedures for visiting artists.
- Although this was identified in the MOU with The University of Akron as having access, these types of spaces will be used at a higher rate than first imagined. An understanding about all available options, processes for access and use procedures, costs of upgrades and/or renovation, etc. will need to be completed.
- The Center and UA will need to work collaboratively to determine how to efficiently support theater space upgrades, in particular around floor and lighting upgrades for Sandifur Theater.

Housing & Transportation

- The Center and UA will need to establish a formal agreement to ensure visiting artists are able to utilize UA discounts on rental cars and housing to ensure cost efficiencies.
- Using the Housing Inventory completed during the Feasibility Study as a starting point, a housing solution that is cost effective for six or more residencies per year will need to be explored.

Start-up Processes

At the conclusion of the feasibility study and ahead of the start of operations, the Team recommends an intermediary managerial step that will lay the administrative ground work for the Center. During this period of ramping up to the start of operations, an interim process should be designed to:

- Work with the Board to create job descriptions for the staff to be hired.
- Launch and coordinate a national search for an Executive Director with assistance from a contractor in January 2016 with the goal of having the Director in place by August, 2016.
- Utilize the MOU preliminary funding research and follow-up suggestions from the National Advisory Committee to create a fundraising prospect list and pursue accordingly.
- Based on the information from above, begin the grant seeking process with contracted assistance.
- Conduct a residency planning and implementation process to ensure there will not be a lapse in creative residency activities during the start-up phase. Identify other types of activities that may be able to be activated ahead of the Executive Director's hiring that could leverage momentum and build visibility for the Center.
- Work with a financial consultant to develop preliminary financial forecasts.
- Establish the Center's financial management procedures and complete the requisite quarterly and annual financial reporting documents with contracted assistance. (See Appendix P for Preliminary Budget.)
- Create an initial website for the Center that will include information about the pilot residencies, Executive Director search, upcoming programs, etc. (A fully functioning website, branding strategy and communications campaign should be designed after the Executive Director has been retained so that person's vision and point of view can inform the process.)
- With input from the Executive Director once he/she is hired, coordinate the design process for the office space that will be donated by UA and begin seeking and evaluating bids for construction and finishes as appropriate and purchase initial staff computer and software needs.

Afterword

Pamela Young, Executive Director, DANCECleveland

Midway through the Feasibility Study, The University of Akron's new President, Dr. Scott Scarborough, endorsed the idea of a new Center for Choreography on the UA campus. With this decision also came the Knight Foundation's momentous announcement that they would establish a $5 million fund to support this new Center.

This news was amazing, thrilling and humbling as we began to realize that our vision for a new National Center for Choreography would be a reality. Even while we were completing the pilot residencies,

compiling resource information and creating this report, we were working in tandem to move from the theoretical feasibility study toward a concrete start-up planning process.

As we release this report, we look back in awe at all that has been accomplished. From the filing of legal papers to the negotiation of a lease, appointment of the founding Board of Directors and completion of various operating documents, the official work of establishing the Center has been completed. Through the articulation of a vision and the development of a curatorial process, the short-term artistic focus of the Center has been defined, and the long-term artistic programs have a firm base upon which to grow. And with the implementation of the recommendations for start-up processes underway, the new Center will soon be up and running.

The Board of Directors has created the first draft of a start-up plan that will launch a national search for the Center's first Executive Director in January, 2016, with the target of having that person in place by July 2016. The Board has also taken a moment to envision a special celebration event to launch the actual opening of the Center. It will be an amazing day for all of us!

This Feasibility Study and subsequent start-up planning have formed a firm basis upon which the National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron can move forward with the intent of truly addressing the national dance community's need for choreographic support. As stated in *Mind The Gap: Artist Residencies and Dance*, the report prepared by the Alliance of Artists Communities in 2011,

> "...If dance is to flourish, it is essential that the field of residencies provide greater opportunities and resources for the development of new dance."

The new National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron, with its bold vision, thoughtful plans, access to world-class facilities and significant start-up funding, is uniquely positioned to provide those badly-needed "greater opportunities and resources for the development of new dance."