

2025

REPORT

ADVISORY STAKEHOLDER TASK FORCE

Recommendations to
Support the Next 50 Years of
Dallas Black Dance Theatre

DALLAS BLACK
DANCE THEATRE



RELENTLESS EXCELLENCE

A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

Dear Community Leaders,

At the dawn of the 50th season, the Dallas Black Dance Theatre (DBDT) is our city's largest and oldest professional dance company. Ranked among the 10 largest modern dance companies in the United States, its impact is profound, having reached more than 5 million patrons of the arts and 3 million students in 17 countries across five continents.

For generations to come, we must ensure that the institution remains a pillar of cultural enrichment in North Texas and beyond.

Like Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Joffrey Ballet, Texas Ballet Theatre, and other peer institutions, unionization efforts haven't been easy. It's often a tumultuous campaign that can take a toll on external reputation with hard-to-understand headlines and scrutiny from philanthropic partners.

Thankfully, a 17-member Task Force of business, civic, and nonprofit leaders stepped up to review the institution's policies, propose changes that foster accountability, and put safeguards in place to prevent future concerns related to dancers.

Over the past six months, the Task Force has had a guiding mission for DBDT to remain a vibrant cultural asset with the highest levels of integrity. Based on experience, expertise, and insights gained from our work, the Task Force developed a series of recommendations through the following activities:

- Thorough review of governance, branding, fundraising, and stakeholder relationships through three subcommittees.
- The subcommittees took a deep dive into the bylaws, DBDT's current financial status, the human resources policy manual, a policy handbook for the dancers, and a report created by the City of Dallas' Office of Inspector General (OIG). One subcommittee also commissioned an assessment of brand reputation, while another sought the advice of well-respected labor attorneys and human resources professionals.
- Listening sessions with more than 40 stakeholders including several City of Dallas council members, department leaders, staff, and civic leaders.
- Interviews with DBDT board members and employees (artistic and administrative).

From all that we have learned, our recommendations are clear and concise. And our independent Task Force's recommendations were not easily made. But, based on our city's history of supporting cultural institutions and managing public-private partnerships through facility investment, it's what's best for the next 50 years of DBDT.



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Senior Vice President of
Public Affairs
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Jennifer Scripps
President & CEO
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OUR TASK FORCE



JENNIFER SCRIPPS

President & CEO,
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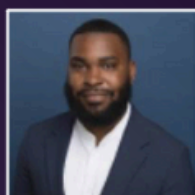
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President & CEO, *Forest Forward*

AN OVERVIEW OF WORK



Formed three subcommittees to review governance, branding, fundraising, and stakeholder relationships



Took a deep dive into critical governance documents including the bylaws, current financial status, human resources policy manual, and inspector general report



Conducted extensive stakeholder listening sessions and interviews with DBDT employees and board members

WE STARTED THREE WORKING GROUPS

MARKETING AND
BRANDING

GOVERNANCE

STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT

AND REVIEWED

- **Bylaws:** 11-page document defining the guidelines that govern the operations of the Board.
- **DBDT's Current Financial Status:** 18-page report on DBDT's fundraising activity, ticket sales revenue, and overall financial impact.
- **Human Resources Policy Handbook:** 78-page document outlining administrative and employee policies.
- **Inspector General Report:** 348-page document reviewing the legality of DBDT's decision to terminate dancers.
- **Dancer Handbook:** 28-page document defining expectations for dancer behavior and conditions of their employment.
- **Labor Union FAQ:** Answers to commonly asked questions about the status of DBDT's relationship with the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

The Task Force also conducted benchmarking research on data from peer performing arts institutions, input from Texas-based nonprofit advisors, and the experience of the Governance subcommittee. Organizations reviewed are:

- Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the Ailey School
- Dance Theatre of Harlem
- Sacramento Ballet
- DanceFlurry Organization
- Pacific Northwest Dance Foundation
- United Square Dancers of America
- Stephen F. Austin State University School of Dance

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

The Stakeholder Engagement subcommittee of the Advisory Stakeholder Task Force met with over 40 community stakeholders to gather their perspectives and solicit recommendations for advancing the organization's mission and future direction.



WE MET WITH

10

Elected and Appointed City
Officials

11

DBDT Board Members and
Employees

17

Philanthropic Leaders

5

Arts District Leaders

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

"DBDT has been "tone deaf" in its governance, overly influenced by its executive director, and resistant to leadership oversight and documentation requests."

"Leadership has not been forthcoming with the City Council, and the board has remained largely absent and unresponsive. "

"The dancer handbook is not applied consistently across the organization, and dancers' First Amendment rights have been restricted. "

"There is a strong consensus that real change is needed, including new board leadership, a new management team, and a reimagined approach to DBDT's future. "

"DBDT has played a vital role in shaping Dallas' cultural landscape through its stewardship of the historic Moorland YMCA."

"DBDT has long been a cultural cornerstone for Dallas, and this is an opportunity to honor that legacy while embracing new leadership that reflects today's community."

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

After careful review and thoughtful discussion, our Task Force has reached recommendations that are both direct and deliberate. These decisions were not made lightly, but with a firm understanding of our city's tradition of supporting cultural institutions and successfully managing public-private partnerships through strategic investment. We believe this course of action represents the strongest path forward for ensuring DBDT's vitality over the next 50 years.

Our recommendations are organized in three separate categories that represent the work of our subcommittees – marketing and branding, stakeholder engagement and governance.

MARKETING AND BRANDING

UPDATE PUBLIC RELATIONS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND SPOKESPERSON POLICIES

Use of social media should reflect present-day culture within guidelines for specific copyright matters. And depending on the issue at hand, there should be a clear public face to media and constituency. We also recommend that the Executive Director should be the de facto spokesperson, with an exception for artistic matters where the Artistic Director takes the lead.

DEVELOP FORMAL CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOLS

A crisis is never the time to define new roles or responsibilities, and administrative and artistic staff should have access to confidential reporting for workplace concerns.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

INCREASE THE ENGAGEMENT AND VISIBILITY OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Greater transparency and engagement across the organization including with employees through annual listening sessions. The board would also benefit from a more proactive, visible role as advocates with key external stakeholders.

INCREASE ENGAGEMENT OF ALUMNI

There's no better ambassador of the institution than alumni of the Dallas Black Dance Academy that have been named U.S. Presidential Scholars of Art and that have graduated from the Juilliard School.

GOVERNANCE

STRENGTHEN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Every guiding body needs to know their roles, responsibilities and expectation for participation. Standing subcommittees need to be incorporated into the bylaws. These leaders should also be encouraged to take stronger oversight of executive leadership and have the responsibility to raise and/or give a specified amount of contributions or time in accordance with the Board of Directors Scorecard annual assessment.

ADD TERM LIMITS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Staggered term limits will promote a healthy dispersal of decision-making and ensure no single group or individual holds sole authority. This approach will bring new operational perspective and encourage a more collaborative governance structure. A strong pipeline of future leaders through an active nominating process would uplift the nonprofit and cultural community.

GOVERNANCE

MODERNIZE THE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

All human resource related documents should be modernized and consolidated into a digitally accessible format that's mobile friendly for today's dancers. And the differentiation between policies for dancers and administrative roles should be reduced. (Unionized dancers will follow policies included in the handbook determined by the Collective Bargaining Agreement with AGMA, once finalized.)

DEFINE STAFF ROLES AND REPORTING STRUCTURE

Ensure that the board consistently updates the job descriptions of the Artistic Director and Executive Director to align with modern standards.

GOVERNANCE

INITIATE A TRANSITION IN LEADERSHIP THAT POSITIONS DBDT FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

From our multiple conversations with community stakeholders, including elected officials, civic leaders, and donors, we've learned that repairing and rebuilding institutional trust is essential.

We acknowledge the initiation of new board leadership.

Given the pending retirement of the Executive Director, our recommendation is that the board initiate a succession plan that includes a national search for the next Executive Director.

It is the understanding of the Task Force that the DBDT Board of Directors has unanimously voted to accept the above recommendations and is in the process of initiating a succession plan for their Board of Directors and the Executive Director.

An Executive Search Committee, to be led by the President of the Board, will begin the search for the next Executive Director in January 2026.

A LOOK TOWARDS THE NEXT 50 YEARS

The Advisory Stakeholder Task Force extends its gratitude to the many individuals and partners who made this work possible.

We thank the civic leaders, city officials, and philanthropic partners who generously shared their perspectives and reaffirmed their commitment to the future of the Dallas Black Dance Theatre. Your insights and encouragement have been invaluable in shaping our recommendations.

We are especially grateful to the leadership, board members, and employees of DBDT who engaged with candor and care throughout this process. Your dedication to the organization's mission, and your willingness to contribute, have been central to the Task Force's understanding and vision for the path ahead.

Finally, we acknowledge the countless community members, donors, and cultural advocates who continue to support DBDT as a cornerstone of artistic excellence in Dallas and beyond. Your partnership ensures that this treasured institution will inspire, educate, and enrich lives for the next 50 years and generations to come.