



A joint action plan of the Australia Council and Ausdance

Background

Dance Plan 2012 was based on the UK's Dance Manifesto, published in 2005. Its aim was to educate and influence UK politicians and to provide advice about what needed to change for dance to reach its potential as an art form practised by all levels in the community.

Ausdance National discussed the idea of producing an Australian version with dance company managers in 2006, and received strong support for its development. In 2007 the Dance Board of the Australia Council suggested partnering with Ausdance to produce a 'dance action plan' rather than a 'dance manifesto' or a dance policy, which is where Dance Plan 2012 began.

With both lead organisations for dance co-operating and contributing funds for its production, forums were held across the country to present the four 'ambitions' and to seek input about strategies for achieving them.

Dance Plan 2012 was launched in July 2008 at the World Dance Alliance Global Summit in Brisbane. It is primarily an action plan for everyone interested in dance to take whatever actions are appropriate to help realize the ambitions it identifies. It sets out an exciting future for Australian dance, and reflects many of the ideas from the forums, inviting 'all those with the energy and enthusiasm to contribute to the realisation of these ambitions to contact us'.

What's in it?

Dance Plan 2012 is an action plan for everyone, not a dance policy for the Australia Council or Ausdance. To achieve its ambitions by 2012, it requires urgent action.

Dance Plan 2012 will require everyone to take action. It is designed as an advocacy tool that can be taken to decision makers in our community – politicians, producers, school principals, local council members etc. – with information that may impact on their decision-making processes. We want to encourage them to consider the value of dance and its potential across a range of contexts (for touring, digital distribution, regional development, in education and training, as a healthy leisure activity for the elderly, as an art form in the curriculum, etc.). We want to ensure that highly trained artists are given every opportunity to remain in the arts workforce and that talented Indigenous artists are identified and promoted through sustainable career pathways. Access and participation in dance is encouraged at all levels.

Four 'ambitions' for 2012 have been identified by the Australian dance sector:

- More excellent and innovative Australian dance
- More opportunities to see and participate in Australian dance
- Dance as an integral part of every young person's education
- A range of sustainable careers for dance artists.

A number of strategies have been identified under each of these ambitions, with the Australia Council leading on the first two, and Ausdance leading on the second two ambitions.

How does it relate to what you do?

If you work in the dance sector in any capacity – as a commercial dancer, a private provider, choreographer, company director or educator – this document relates to you and your work. However, there may be ideas for realising the four ambitions that have not been included in Dance Plan 2012, and we'd love to hear from you about those, and about ways in which you might participate in advocating for your sector or a particular ambition.

How could you help realise particular ambitions?

Apart from contacting the Australia Council or Ausdance with your expression of interest, Dance Plan 2012 provides the perfect opportunity to visit your local council, school or Federal member of Parliament to discuss the plans contained in it. For instance, under 'dance to be an integral part of every young person's education' there is a strong statement about dance and young people:

'The opportunity is huge for dance to be a valued part of every person's education, offering creative, healthy and stimulating experiences for all Australians throughout their lives.'

This statement is worth discussing with school principals or your local council, or as part of a higher-level pitch to Education Departments for curriculum and professional development. Another example is the lobbying of building authorities and town planners – the ambition to see all new physical dance spaces in schools and theatres meeting OH&S standards by 2012 will need ongoing advocacy if this is to be realised, e.g. sprung floors installed in all new public spaces where dance is likely to be taught or performed.

Whatever part of the document you choose to promote, it might also be useful to discuss your ideas for promoting the plan with your local Ausdance office. You should also think about timing – e.g. is there an election pending?

Who should we target?

Decision makers at all levels are the target for this document. It is not just for politicians, but for anyone in a position to make decisions about dance and its place in our communities. For instance, a sports club could be invited to fund raise to bring disadvantaged children to classes or performances.

If you do focus on politicians, remember all the candidates in forthcoming elections, the opposition parties, and backbench committees. Dance Plan 2012 is deliberately visual to enable those not familiar with the dance industry to relate to its messages, with minimal text to enable advocates to speak with clarity about the issues contained in it.

How should we approach decision makers?

Plan what you want to say and write a letter setting out the agenda and asking for an appointment. Follow up with a phone call to confirm a time.

Going to the meeting with a small group could be quite effective, as long everyone has planned what they want to say and decided who will lead the discussion. If possible, include a high profile person in the group, someone your decision maker will recognise as a credible spokesperson.

The meeting

Present Dance Plan 2012 as an action plan for the future of dance. Draw attention to the last page, in which it states that it has been 'supported by government arts funding agencies, the tertiary dance council, dance companies and independent artists, the studio sector, the commercial and community sectors, venues, presenters and producers.'

Reinforce its four main ambitions, and briefly describe what each of these means. Then focus on the section you want to discuss, e.g. 'Dance to offer a range of sustainable careers'. Point to relevant strategies under that heading, and lead a discussion about how this person might contribute to realising this ambition.

Be clear about what you want him or her to do. They will otherwise wonder why you are there, and be left without a clear understanding of either the document or the reason for your visit. Ensure that you are also clear about the actions you will be taking to realise the ambition you are focusing on – decision makers don't want to be made to feel this is their entire responsibility!

Keep the meeting brief and to the point, no longer than half an hour. Busy people want to be engaged by positive action, and because Dance Plan 2012 is a plan for the future, it should be relatively simple to be engaging about it. But be wary of straying from the point or waffling.

Follow up

It is very important to follow up these meetings with a letter thanking people for their attention, and setting out clearly and concisely your understanding of the conversation. Reiterate again what it is you want to see coming out of the meeting.

Spread the word! Make sure your colleagues and friends make personal contact with their local MPs and other decision makers to discuss Dance Plan 2012, and encourage others in the dance sector to thoroughly read the document and become familiar with its contents.

Stay in touch with the people to whom you are advocating and provide updates about new developments. Invite them to performances, let them know success stories with local artists or teachers, invite them to launch your new book or film. Keep dance in their field of vision!

For more information contact your local Ausdance office or visit www.ausdance.org.au