



San Diego Dance Community Gathering

Presented by Milana Aernova | February 28, 2026



San Diego Art Matters

Nonprofit arts advocacy and service organization

San Diego ART Matters (SDAM) is a nonprofit arts advocacy and service organization whose mission is to strengthen San Diego's creative ecosystem and advocate for greater public and private investment in the people and institutions that make our region's arts and culture sector thrive.



San Diego Dance Initiative

The history and where we are now



FAR SOUTH  BORDER NORTH

Previous San Diego Dance Alliances

Previous San Diego dance alliances included the San Diego Dance Alliance, San Diego Dance Network, and San Diego Dance Connect but were ultimately unsustainable because of funding and leadership shifts.

Zaquia's Town Halls

Zaquia Mahler Salinas, a dance leader and founder of DISCO RIOT, received a Far South Border North grant from SD Art Matters to host dance community town halls to begin the work to connect and heal the dance community. The town halls were discontinued due to lack of funding and support. Zaquia now lives in Boston.

Where we are now

Thanks to the generosity of the Jill Hall fund, San Diego Art Matters was able to hire a Program Coordinator to help carry out the San Diego Dance Initiative as outlined by the original [White Paper](#). We've conducted our feedback period and have begun the work!

Dance Service Organizations

The goal of the Dance Initiative



Feedback Period

Overview of community feedback
and engagement process



Community Engagement

A three-month process gathered insights from community members and leaders through individual connections and conversations.

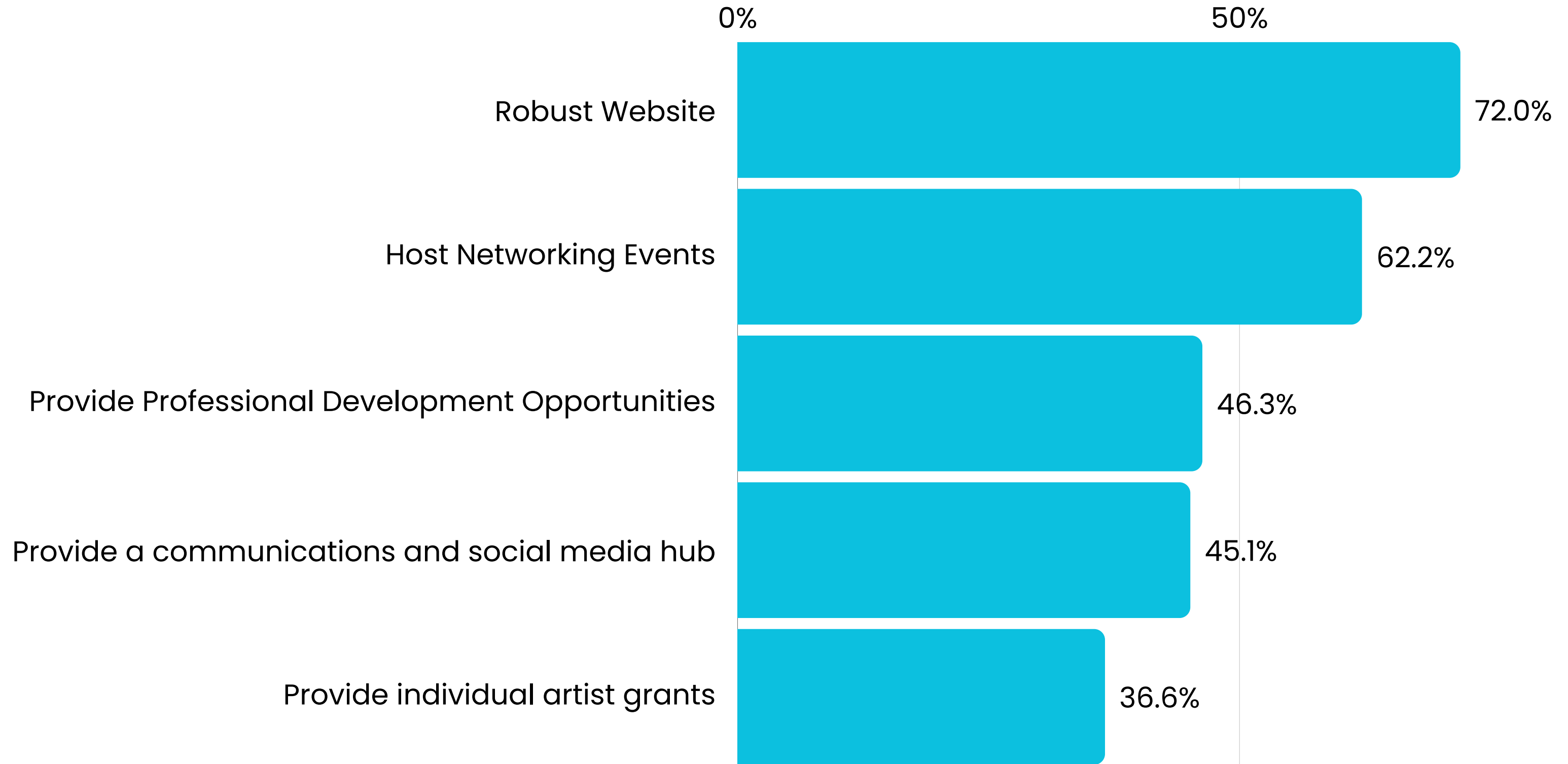
Feedback Sessions

Community members participated in three public feedback sessions, contributing valuable perspectives on the dance ecosystem's needs.

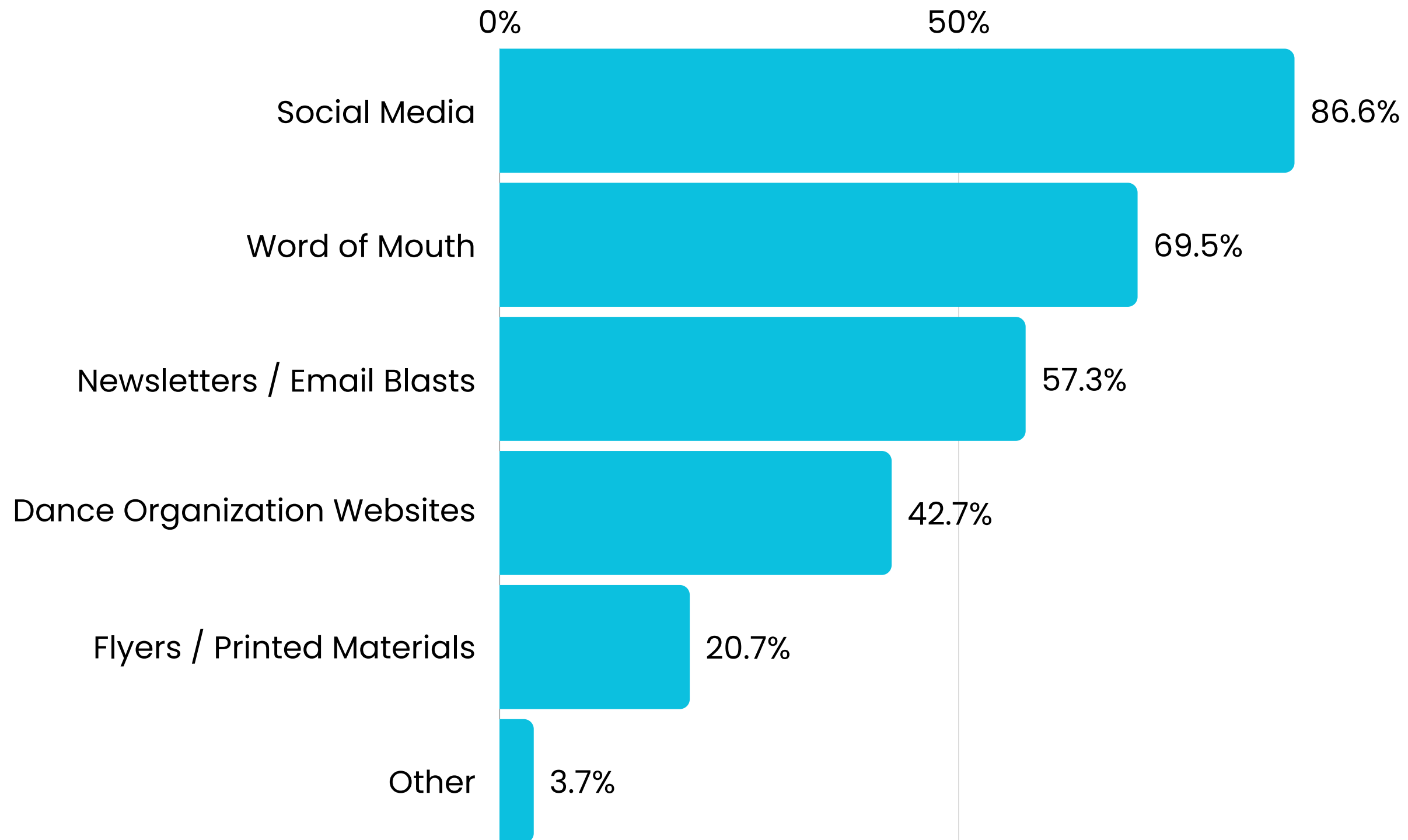
Survey Participation

Over 80 individuals completed the initial dance community feedback survey, providing crucial data to shape the San Diego Dance Initiative's strategic direction.

Top 5 Programs/Services Desired



How do you typically get information related to dance opportunities?



Theme 1

Need for Greater Visibility & Centralized Information



What We Heard

- Difficulty finding opportunities and events
- Lack of a centralized calendar or resource hub
- Desire for stronger public awareness of dance and more engaged audiences

Implication

- A shared digital platform and coordinated communications are essential.

Action

- Create a robust dance website with a functional community dance calendar and resources hub.

Theme 2

Desire for Stronger Community Connection



What We Heard

- Limited cross-sector collaboration and resource-sharing
- Desire for more networking and mentorship-building opportunities
- Interest in greater advocacy for independent dance artists and organizations

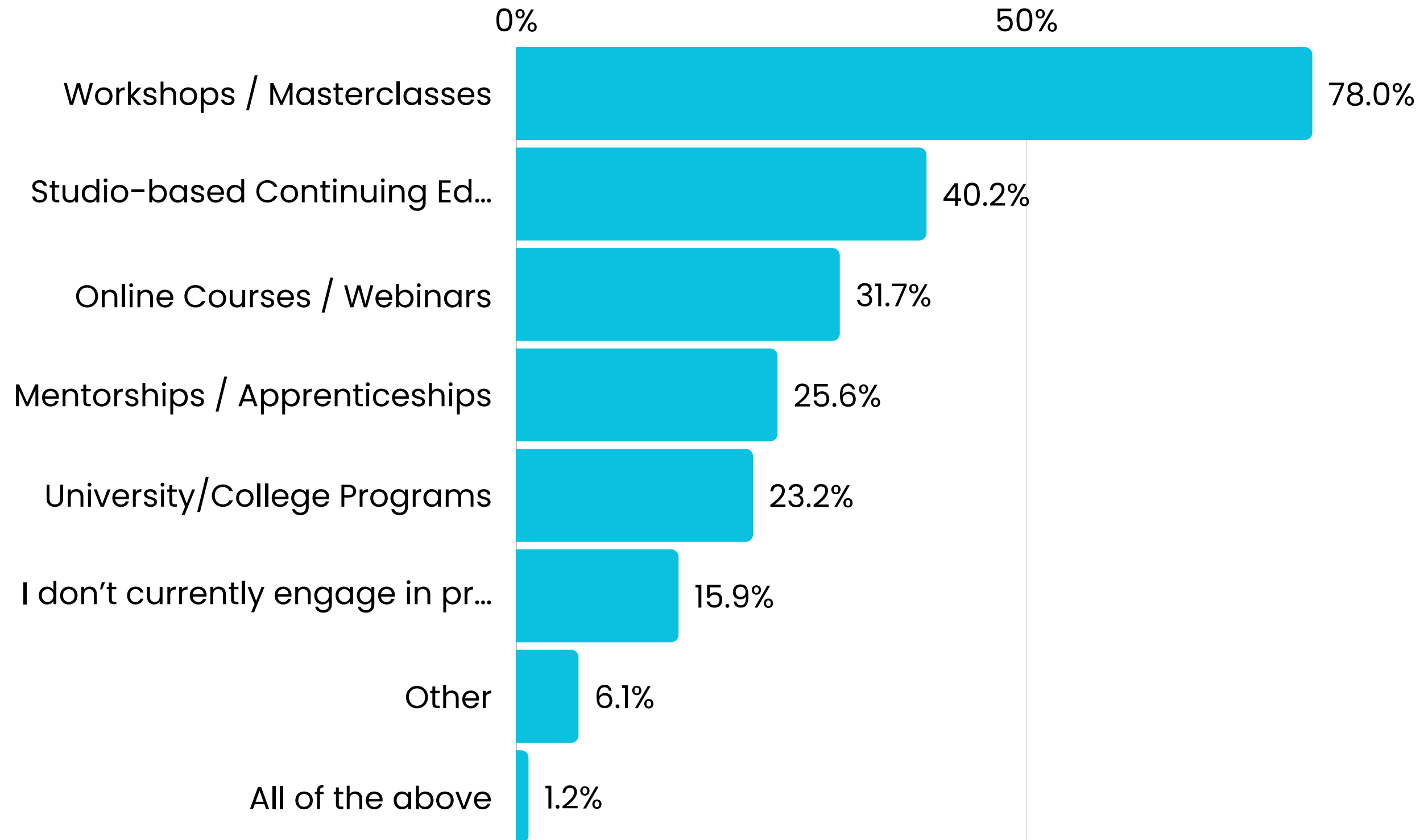
Implication

- Regular convenings and relationship-building opportunities are needed.

Action

- Host quarterly networking events to create spaces for dancers, administrators, leaders, and supporters to connect and collaborate.

Where do you currently seek professional development opportunities?



Theme 3

Sustainability & Professional Development Gaps



What We Heard

- Financial instability and burn-out is too common among dance artists and administrators
- Difficulty finding funding on an individual, project, and organizational level
- Need for organizational and independent artist professional development opportunities
- Desire for mentorship and peer learning

Implication

- Professional development must be a core initiative priority.

Action

- Collaborate with dance organizations and leaders on at least three professional development workshops.

Theme 4

Shared Leadership & Representation



What We Heard

- Need for transparency, accountability, and trust
- Desire for diverse and representative voices in decision-making
- Desire for community-driven decision-making

Implication

- A representative steering leadership structure is necessary.

Action

- Establish a diverse and representative steering committee to guide the Dance Initiative in its first foundational year.

Strategic Priorities

Based on community feedback, we are focused on three key priorities for this first foundational year.

Priority 1: Establish Steering Committee

Goal: Create a diverse and representative Steering Committee to guide the initiative.

Priority 2: Robust Online Presence

Goal: Create a centralized website that serves as the digital home for the dance community, along with a strong and active social media presence to support and promote our artists and organizations.

Priority 3: Foster Connection & Professional Growth

Goal: Strengthen relationships and sustainability across the ecosystem through quarterly convenings and professional development workshop.

Full Assets & Reports

Scan the QR code to view the survey results, feedback session notes, Theory of Change, and the original White Paper



Questions,
Comments,
Suggestions?

Let's connect!

Feel free to send me an email at
coordinator@sdartmatters.org

Share feedback anonymously here:



Community Pitches

“The world belongs to those who show up!”





It's time to get up and
meet someone new!

Let's connect and dream into
the future of San Diego dance!

Prompt #1

What made you
fall in love with
dance?

P.S. Don't forget to
introduce yourself! 😊

Prompt #2

What do you wish
more people
understood about
dance?

P.S. Don't forget to
introduce yourself! 😊

Prompt #3

What are some of your
or your organization's
dance dreams for this
year?

P.S. Don't forget to
introduce yourself! 😊

Prompt #4

Describe your favorite/most memorable dance performance/project that you experienced and why it was notable.

P.S. Don't forget to introduce yourself! 😊

Prompt #5

What would make
the dance
ecosystem in San
Diego more
sustainable?

P.S. Don't forget to
introduce yourself! 😊



Let's create a network!

We are more interconnected than we could ever imagine!





Let's get in a circle!

Using a ball of yarn:

- One person shares their name + what they're seeking (connections, opportunities, etc)
- They toss the yarn to someone who can offer something.
- That person shares and tosses again.
- Complete until everyone is connected

Get Involved

Let's connect!

Feel free to send me an email at
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We want to keep improving
and growing! Please share your
feedback anonymously here:

