

International Tap Association National Tap Plan

By Suzanne Callahan
With Brooke Belott and Jane Jerardi
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Executive Summary

Introduction

[Audiences] are more excited about tap than anything else they have seen, absolutely enraptured. We had some of the best audiences for tap. They were thirsty for it.

- Interviewee

In August, 2005, the International Tap Association (ITA) retained Callahan Consulting for the Arts to conduct a national planning process for tap, which would assist the field of professional artists and administrators in setting goals and making decisions for its future. Founded in 1987 as the only national/international service organization for tap, the mission of the International Tap Association is to promote the understanding, preservation and development of tap as an art form. The planning process is directed toward the tap field overall, rather than the ITA or any one organization.

The Rationale for a National Plan

The planning process comes at a critical juncture when, despite increasing tap activity primarily through the tap festivals and studios, which have multiplied across the country, the art form lacks a solid infrastructure of support. Such a comprehensive planning process had never before been undertaken for the entire field of tap dance, which includes performers, educators, presenters, producers, and writers/critics/historians. Nationwide the lack of coordinated efforts has hindered the development and sustainability of this art form. The art form has had a limited presence in academic dance programs, dance service organizations and major presenting series. Outside of the tap practitioners and those closest to the form, there is not an understanding of its history, influence on other dance forms, audience development opportunities, or technical and artistic needs.

Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support from So'Danca Dancewear & Shoes and individuals, the goals of this year-long planning effort have been to:

- Assess the major issues and needs facing the tap field, including opportunities and gaps in resources and capacity;

- Identify areas where national collaboration would serve the field, and make recommendations about pursuing such collaboration;
- Determine the most effective ways to raise the visibility and understanding of tap dance on the part of the dance field's administrators, funders and others; and
- Ultimately, to lay the groundwork for developing a more formalized structure to support this art form that draws from so many cultures and has flourished on American soil.

Key Questions and Issues

The planning process was designed to gather information on key issues, as seen through the perspectives of two distinct and equally important segments of the dance field: 1) The tap field, broadly speaking, including artists, teachers, and festival directors, who work each day teaching, performing, and choreographing, and leading organizations; and 2) The national dance leadership, including presenters, agents, funders, writers and other administrators, who have extensive experience with presenting, booking, planning, resource development, and service provision for a variety of dance forms (including ballet, modern, jazz, hip-hop and a host of other folk and traditional forms). A key question to be addressed in the planning process was *To what degree are these two groups operating on different assumptions and how might these two spheres be brought closer together? Specifically, how might the national dance field better understand the impact and needs of the tap field, and how might the tap field better understand the ways in which national presenters function?*

The issues defined in initial planning meetings echo many of the concerns that had been expressed in other meetings, some of which dated back to 1986. They are as follows:

1. Performance Opportunities. While festivals benefit those within the tap community, who both perform and attend, they don't feed into mainstream presenting. *What are the reasons why tap is not being booked, and what could be done to interest presenters in the art form and ultimately present it?*
2. Infrastructure and Relationship Development. *What might be a workable infrastructure for a field that has such limited resources, and operates differently than other kinds of nonprofit dance?*
3. Audience Development. *What might be done to increase presenters' understanding of tap's ability to attract audiences of all ages, races, ethnicities, and walks of life?*
4. National Marketing. There is little knowledge of the history of tap – not only its aesthetic sensibilities, but its achievements. *What are the most effective ways to market this history?*
5. Production Quality. *To what degree is the lack of professionally produced tap shows affecting bookings and what might be done to improve quality and production values?*
6. Artistic Development. *To what degree is quality an issue, and what might be done to address it?*

7. Media Education. *Given that media coverage is a conundrum for all dance forms, what might be done to encourage it for tap?*

8. Booking. *Very few tap dancers have agents. To what degree is booking/representation a problem?*

9. Understanding of Tap History Among Younger Artists. *How might this information be shared, particularly with young tappers?*

10. Outreach to Musicians. *What are ideas for how to strengthen the connections between tap dancers and musicians?*

Methodology

In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts granted funding to the ITA for the planning process. In the summer of 2005, a national Steering Committee of artists, company directors and former and current festival directors was formed. In October 2005, the Committee met in Boulder to shape the direction and parameters of the planning process, determined the most critical issues to be explored, and identify key individuals to be surveyed and interviewed. The Committee met in Boulder again in May 2006 to review the research findings, envision where the field might be in ten years, and suggest projects and strategies to advance some of the report's recommendations.

The planning process overall was braiding of three major strands: The Steering Committee focused the project's direction at the outset; the Consultant team conducted national research and drafted the report. The Steering Committee then discussed the report's findings and recommendations, endorsed it and considered next steps. (A Summary of the May 2006 Steering Committee's review of the report is attached.) Subsequently, the report was shared with Resource Consultants, a select group of individuals who know the broader dance field well and agreed to read it and provide feedback. Those conversations began to increase awareness of the findings and issues in this report.

National Research. Data was collected from across the country in three ways.

- Review of Written Documents. Historical information pertinent to the planning process was reviewed and summarized.
- Research on Tap Artists and Organizers. A survey was designed for artists as well as key individuals who organize events for tap, who are known throughout this report as "tap organizers," were asked to provide statistics on the scope of their activities, budgets and administrative characteristics; commentary on their accomplishments and challenges; and opinions on issues that are relevant to the broader field.

- Interviews with Dance Leadership. Interviews of 30-90 minutes each were conducted with 24 dance leaders from around the country to more fully understand the experiences and perspectives of those who fund, present, and provide services for the broader dance field.

Dissemination and Uses of the Plan

The ITA will disseminate the final Plan to funders, artists, educators, presenters, producers, writers/critics/historians, libraries and others for implementation. It will be used in a variety of ways, including:

- It can serve as a tool to fundraise for the national tap field, focusing on the specific areas set forth in the recommendations section.
- It can also serve as a tool to fundraise in local communities. Tap artists and festivals are encouraged to use the findings to justify their funding requests and legitimize the impact of their own work and tap overall.
- It can inform and educate national dance leaders, including funders and presenters, to build understanding, relationships and possibly resources for the many artists and entities.
- It illustrates to tap organizations and artists that there can be strengths in numbers; working together, the field can accomplish what no single organization could on its own.
- It may be released in full form and in an executive summary, and possibly excerpted in the ITA magazine *On Tap*, so that the broadest possible segment of the tap field will know about and learn from it.
- It can be used by students, who are learning not only tap but other dance forms and arts administration, to better understand the inner workings of this segment of the dance field and how research can be used to make decisions for the betterment of the field.
- Finally, it can be a tool to understand the enormous appeal and value that tap has for the countless audiences who view and study it.

As a whole, it is hoped that the planning process will build upon, celebrate, promote, and connect the efforts of those who teach, perform, administer and advocate for tap in various locations in the US. The generosity with which people gave their time and information illustrates their enormous passion for tap and interest in helping the field.

Surveys from Artists and Tap Organizers

A total of 48 surveys were sent and 33 surveys were received. The names of respondents can be found in Appendix C of the full report.

Artists: Who They Are. Of the 22 artist respondents, 70% are female and 30% are male. Artist respondents tended toward the older age bracket. More than half are over 50 and over three quarters are over 40. Over two-thirds of respondent artists are white/Caucasian; a third are people of color, with one respondent not specifying race. **Survey respondents balance a striking number of different roles in their tap careers.** The majority work as performers, choreographers *and* as teachers (82%). **For over three-quarters of these artists, performing is**

one of their paid activities. Over half self-produce their own shows, perform in festivals and offer lecture demonstrations as well as other types of engagements. In addition to festivals, most perform for other presenters. **In an average year, these artists make possible an estimated 270 artist engagements.** Over three-quarters of artists (76%) hire other dancers and musicians, and work with a range of four to as many as 80 artists in a single year (an average of 21 times each year). Almost a third (32%) of these artists come from out of town to perform and over two-thirds (68%) were local.

Scope of Tap Organizations. Most of the organizations that responded – nine of the 11 (or 82%) – present multi-day tap dance festivals that range from two days to two weeks with the average lasting about six days. Festivals presented from five to 90 solo artists in performances. **A total of 91% of respondent organizations present anywhere from a single show to 50 performances in a year (an average of 18 shows).** Seven organizations mentioned specific additional activities including producing and distributing newsletters, maintaining archives, teaching tap and creative movement to toddlers, serving on panels, teacher training, university classes, and sponsoring out of town artists for master classes. Together, the 11 organizations last year provided an estimated total of 291 artist engagements. In a given year, each of these organizations pay between five and 80 artists. About one-third (32%) travel from out of town to perform or teach and over two-thirds (68%) were local.

Comparison of Artists to Tap Organizers

Organizational Structure. Over half of the artists who responded maintain both private studios *and* a non-profit structure for their offerings. In total, over two-thirds of artists own private studios and almost three-quarters work through non-profit organizations. Similarly, over three-quarters of tap organizers are non-profit.

Teaching/Classes. **Nearly all of the artists who responded (91%) teach tap dance regularly; all of the respondent organizations offer tap dance training.** The frequency of instruction ranged from occasional master classes to as many as 21 classes per week by one artist, with an average of over nine classes taught every week. The number of classes offered by organizations ranged from six to 100 classes per week.

Space. **Clearly, both artists and organizers rely almost solely on rented space.** Artists access space for their events primarily through rental (86%) with some also sharing space (27%) and bartering for space (9%). Only one respondent (5%) owned space used for events. Similarly, all of the responding tap organizations rent space to accommodate their events and only one organization owns space.

Budget Size and Range. **The budgets of artists' companies ranged from under \$10,000 to over \$300,000, but a high concentration were below \$100,000.¹ Almost two-thirds of tap organizations reported budgets of less than \$100,000 to support their activity.** Of artists who reported financial information, *over three-quarters have budgets under \$100,000 and*

¹ Twenty-four percent didn't self-report their budget size.

*almost half have budgets that fall below \$50,000.*² Artists' budgets came from a range of sources, with over three-quarters (76%) of artists noting earned income and half securing contributed (50%) and in-kind (45%) donations. Tap organizations also secure their budgets through a range of sources. All of the organizations reported earned income and most identified contributed (73%) and in-kind (91%) sources. Matching the tap artists, *all* of the tap organizations generate income from classes. **Clearly, earned income is a major source of support.**³

Staffing. **The tap organizations operate with very little administrative staff, relying instead on volunteers. However, they provide substantial work for artists.** In total, 13 full-time and 11 part-time administrative staff members support these organizations' operations, in addition to the support of some freelance staff. *The striking level of activity is undoubtedly made possible by a reported total of 192 volunteers. In comparison, these same organizations provide 223 artists with part-time and freelance employment.*

Marketing. **Both artists and organizations employ a range of marketing techniques to get the word out about their performances, workshops and activities. "Word of mouth" was frequently mentioned as one of the best forms of marketing.** However, nearly all utilize email campaigns and free print advertising. Over three-quarters (77%) of artists have websites and receive press coverage. An even higher percentage (91%) of tap organizations had a web presence. Nearly all organizations take advantage of free advertising and use direct mail.

Geographic Reach. While most artists and organizers clearly saw their organization as a city or state resource, **a striking number – over half of both artists and organizers – also perceived the impact of their organizations on the regional, national and even international scale.**

Accomplishments

Artists and tap organizers list a broad and impressive range of accomplishments that illustrate the diversity of function and reach of the tap field.

Education. **Virtually all of them teach**, reaching thousands of young people. One program enrolls 400 children ages four to 18 each year. As one artist explains, "Teaching and passing on the traditions and sharing my passion with my students has been my greatest source of accomplishment." **Many maintain schools**, some of them quite large. One school has six studios plus a gymnasium to accommodate its classes; another operates five. **They offer scholarships** to young people. One organization offers half of its students full or partial scholarships based on need and ability. Many speak of efforts to provide kids the opportunity, as one artist put it, to "dream big." **They give youth opportunities to perform.** Several artists run youth companies that tour locally, nationally and even internationally. **They offer a diverse curriculum.** Some have academic requirements, with one school noting that it requires its

² In a study of contemporary dance artists in Chicago in 2005, *Serving Dance in Chicago: A Planning Process for Small to Mid-sized Companies and Independent Artists*, by Suzanne Callahan with Brooke Belott, the budget breakdown was virtually the same.

³ Organizations were not asked to report what percentage of their income comes from these sources.

students to maintain a B average to participate in its programs. **A few maintained dancers on contract.** One artist, for example, supports seven resident artists with a 32-week paid annual contract.

Administrative. **The tap organizers have maintained festivals**, some of them for as long as 15 years. “Students really get a chance to interact with the master teachers. Most who attend come back annually. The master tappers that come to teach always want to come back. To me this is my proudest accomplishment!” **A few had obtained some degree of infrastructure**, with one highlighting their board, paid staff and even a strategic plan. **Most have obtained and maintained a space** for tap, which often serves as a home for the art form. **They obtained press.** The participation at one tap organizer’s festival skyrocketed from 30 participants in 2003 to an estimated 1,000 in 2006, due in part to growing media coverage. Coverage included listings and previews in local print media, an interview segment on the local television news, and in an airline’s in-flight magazine. **Many have obtained funding** from local, state and national sources. At the same time, a considerable number (two festivals and about half of the artists) **made all of their activity happen without funding.** Many tap artists boast of **longevity**, and making due with remarkably low resources.

Choreography and Performance. **Artists have performed with master artists** such as Peg Leg Bates, Buster Brown, Eddie Brown, Ernest “Brownie” Brown, Brenda Bufalino, Lon Chaney, Honi Coles, Steve Condos, Charles “Cookie” Cook, Harold Cromer, Arthur Duncan, Chuck Green, Savion Glover, Gregory Hines, Fayard Nicholas, the Nicholas Brothers, Donald O’Connor, Sarah Petronio, Leonard Reed, LaVaughan Robinson, Jimmy Slyde, the Step Brothers, Dianne Walker, and Chester Whitmore. Despite balancing numerous roles, these artists have found ways to **create work and choreograph.** One artist mentioned 150 choreographic premieres to date in her career. The **sheer amount of touring** of many of these artists is striking. Some tour for months every year, as one artist described spending three and a half to four months a year in Europe performing. Many **tour internationally.** Several founded and some still **run tap ensembles and companies**, boasting residencies and seasons at such venues as The Joyce and Lincoln Center. Many consistently **explore and show the connections between jazz music and tap dance.** Some work to **bridge the traditional with the new.** Most **create opportunities for and pay artists**, supporting both luminaries and newcomers alike. They **present and commission artists, including the masters.**

Building Community. They **mentor younger artists** in a wide range of ways and provide **opportunities for the younger generation.** Many clearly see their success not only in themselves, but in those they mentor and teach. Most of the artists see their role in passing on the tradition as they strive for the young to **understand their historical roots.** A number spoke of **being part of—and rallying—an international network of artists.** One spoke with pride of “presenting the variety of styles inherent in tap dance instead of one voice” and being “historically connected with the masters of the form and at the same time, work[ing] with new contemporary artists.” Many tap organizers **serve as the de facto staff for master artists**, as fundraisers, managers, archivists, and publicists in addition to often providing performance opportunities to the “greats.” Several described their efforts to promote veteran artists so that they might receive “long-overdue recognition” for their “contributions to the art form.” Among

them are some of the most **influential women of tap**, who had worked hard to make a place for women in the art form. Several **helped to found the ITA** and many value it. Many work with different audiences. They **use tap as a mechanism to encourage community involvement**, by having their companies or students perform for events and benefits. Many spoke of the **sheer joy** of tap dance as sustaining their dedication to the form.

Recognition and Products. Many have **received and sponsored awards**, including Emmys, FloBerts, Alpert Award in the Arts, the Savion Glover Award, Tradition in Tap award, as well as other regional and state awards like a city’s arts hall of fame.⁴ Many **write about the form** publishing books, articles, and contributing to scholarly journals, newspapers, and magazines. A few successfully **sell retail merchandise**. Several **produced documentary films** about tap, its history and the great artists. Others **created and toured exhibitions** on tap luminaries and maintained other archives. Many **referenced the importance of history**, naming master artists by first name, seeing the importance of connecting these mentors “with the new generation” and feeling a responsibility to “pass on the lineage, the heritage” given to them.

Perceived Challenges

The survey asked both artists and the leaders of tap organizations to consider the challenges they face, by rating them on a scale of one to five, with one representing the least challenging and five being the most challenging. The three challenges that rose to the top of both groups’ lists as key concerns were **infrastructure, media education, and public awareness**. When artists and tap organizers were later asked to select and rank *just three* of these issues as their top priorities, **paid performing opportunities** and **opportunities for artistic development** surfaced as key challenges.

Challenges	Artists		Tap Organizers	
	# who prioritized	% who prioritized	# who prioritized	% who prioritized
Performance Opportunities	11	50%	5	45%
Artistic Development	8	36%	4	36%
Public Awareness	6	27%	4	36%
Infrastructure	6	27%	2	18%
Audience Development	5	23%	5	45%
Media Education	5	23%	2	18%
Booking and Representation	4	18%	1	9%
Sharing Tap History	4	18%	0	0%
Copyright Issues	1	5%	1	9%
Health Insurance	1	5%	Not asked	
Other: Space	2	9%	Not specified	

⁴ Though not referenced specifically, tap artists who were surveyed or interviewed have also received Guggenheim Fellowships and National Heritage Fellowships.

Artists were then asked to elaborate on their ratings. Their comments appear in the full report and reveal the ways in which these challenges play out in their professional lives; the limitations they set on the field at large; and the potential that could be offered if they were addressed.

Artists Priorities When Related to Funding. Artists and tap organizers were asked about how they would use additional funds, if they had them. Rather than drawing from a predetermined list as with the charts above, respondents could speak freely about their needs. This hypothetical questioning allows respondents the freedom to think broadly about the field's needs rather than censor their thoughts due to money constraints. Similar to the priorities expressed in the chart above, the top two areas were tied: artistic development and promotion. The next highest priority was staffing and human resources; eight commented that they would hire staff and six would pay their existing staff and themselves more. Tied with staffing was the priority to institutionalize tap and/or form a national center. One artist fantasized about the range of what such a space might offer:

It would be a school, a theatre, a big website for tap enthusiasts, a digital production facility, and an archive. It would be part of an active network of dancers, teachers, choreographers, writers, scholars, documenters, presenters and publicists. It would provide fellowship and residency opportunities for tap artists to develop their work. It would provide educational facilities for students, writers, and presenters to learn about the extraordinary range of the field. It would have high standards for excellence, but it would not privilege one approach to rhythm dancing over another. It would provide ongoing learning opportunities for anyone interested. It would be like Dance Theater Workshop and the National Performance Network, but for rhythm dance artists.

Other priorities mentioned included completing books and compiling archives; educational funding such as school programs and scholarships; and revamping or purchasing space.

The Growth and Popularity of Tap Over the Last Ten Years

Almost three-quarters of artists (72%) report growth in their amount of work over the past ten years, while 14% saw their work stay the same and 14% saw a decrease in work. Many artists attributed this to their own determination and ambition. Others attributed the growth of their own work to the multiplicity of their roles as company directors, presenters and teachers. Tap organizers reported an even more optimistic view of the growth of tap in comparison to tap artists. Nearly all reported growth in their own organization in the past 10 years. But, more often, tap organizers connected this development with their own marketing efforts including word of mouth about strong programs. Many saw their “emphasis on quality of programming” and securing “top name faculty” as the key to contributing to this growth and earning a strong reputation for their successful events. Some also saw the rewards of investing in an infrastructure.

When asked about their impressions of the tap field overall, 73% of tap artists saw growth in tap's popularity, while a smaller number saw its popularity decreasing (9%) or staying about

the same (5%).⁵ **Similarly, 73% of tap organizers perceived growth in popularity**, with 9% seeing tap's popularity staying the same, 9% seeing a decrease, and 9% not responding. Several artists and tap organizers credited specific shows like "Bring in Da Noise/Bring in Da Funk" (aka "Noise/Funk"), "Lord of the Dance", and "Tap Dogs" for increasing visibility. Others credited **specific role models** like Savion Glover, Gregory Hines and Brenda Bufalino for their stewardship of the art form. Artists commented on the importance of high-quality teaching. An artist spoke of the "dedicated work by individual teachers who have been inspired by the old artists" as fueling the popularity of the art form. Several artists spoke of the ITA itself as key in raising visibility and even their own awareness. Many artists saw the tap festival circuit as "really getting the word out" on a grassroots level. More than one artist mentioned tap's broad appeal to audiences.

Some artists, though, did see reasons for concern about what they saw as a more stagnant, or decreased, interest in tap across the US. Some artists commented on fewer professional performance opportunities. Some artists spoke of the power of single stars or touring shows as a double-edged sword. One tap organizer acknowledged that it "takes a big name to get [an audience's] attention." Another artist commented, "In more recent years without a major tap show, the visibility [of tap] has decreased

Quality

While the survey did not specifically ask about the quality of tap dance currently in the field, it emerged in artists' and tap organizers' responses to a number of questions. **While artists and tap organizers were proud of the proliferation of the art form in the past several decades, they recognize the need to establish and promote higher standards of professionalism.** One artist explained, "I think that too much...gets presented in the tap genre with an almost 'anything goes' attitude." Another artist emphasized that "only qualified acts should go for the paying jobs. One amateur act will cause that promoter to prejudice all tap acts." **In particular, artists expressed concern about the blurred distinction between professional tap and what should be promoted as avocational or children's dance.** "Tap dance must leave the 'family reunion' atmosphere of most festival concerts. Until we can do this, we will not gain the respect of the average theater/dance patron and contributor." A second artist also referenced the festivals as a help and a hindrance: "While they helped to multiply student interest in tap, they now have "created a circuit where you can hardly ever perform outside the community. In a strange way it starts to resemble the amateur competition circuit. We are preaching to the choir at the festivals. It's time for the circuit to work into something else." **A major aid in increasing quality, artists thought, was mentorship.** Professional training in universities might also increase quality.

Sharing Resources with a Tap Network

A number of artists hoped that the tap community at large could work better together in the future. When asked what they might share with a national tap network, artists and tap organizers alike offered a range of possibilities including tap curriculum; writing articles and sharing books; archival videos, photos and exhibitions; consultation, coaching and mentoring; sample marketing

⁵ Three artists (14%) didn't respond.

materials; promotional experience in TV and film; sharing best practices; as well as generally creating a sense of community.

There were considerable instances in which the national interviews overlap with artists' perceptions. Just as important, there were other areas in which the interviews provide deep insight into why some of the circumstances described above exist, and how they might be addressed.

Interviews with National Dance Leaders

[The first time I saw tap] I was completely transformed. I did not realize art could rise spontaneously and be so joyous and unpretentious. It completely changed my idea about dance.
—A dance writer

The following summaries illustrate the interviewees' perspectives on the art form of tap and the field's current strengths and challenges. These interviewees play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the tap field and the presenting/booking world. Some were selected specifically because of their familiarity with tap, while others were selected because they had *not* been interested in tap – particularly to find out why not. As is the nature with any community, the research generated a variety of viewpoints that do not always agree. While some of the information may be new to the reader, and perhaps even difficult to hear, it was offered thoughtfully and constructively by individuals who collectively have an extraordinary amount of wisdom, insight and experience and who want to help the tap field succeed.

As a group, interviewees had a high level of experience with tap, among the highest in the country. What made them unique was their experience with professional dance, including tap. Interviewees included dance presenters, agents, artists, funders, historians, archivists, professional choreographers, producers, professors, writers, administrators and service organization heads. Several had been major or occasional tap presenters at one point in their careers, and had since segued into a range of other positions. Therefore, they could often speak of tap within the context of other disciplines or dance forms, making their perspectives useful in understanding how tap fits into the overall dance ecosystem. Among the interviewees were people who had put together and presented major tap tours and events that have been remembered by audiences and the dance field for decades. Some interviewees had a strong understanding of tap history and most referred to the tap legends by name throughout the interviews.⁶ In fact, it is interesting to note that a significant portion of interviewees' most positive and compelling experiences were in some way connected to these master tappers, whether interviewees had developed knowledge of their roles in the art form's history, had been inspired by their performances, or had developed personal or professional relationships with them.

Many interviewees described key moments in their lives when they were “bitten by the tap bug” and became lovers of the form. Many became inspired by seeing tap at performances and festivals, and in particular, several described vivid memories of watching some of tap's legends

⁶ Throughout this report, tap masters will be referred to by first name or by a nickname in quotes.

perform. Two key events were Jane Goldberg's *By Word of Foot*, which included Honi, [John] Bubbles, Brenda Bufalino and younger dancers and the Colorado Dance Festival's 1986 two-week tap festival. CDF proved instrumental in coalescing many outstanding artists and generating new momentum in the tap field; it spurred the development of numerous other festivals and presentations. Many have been part of the tap field by profession at some point, or have interacted intensively with it, and their own personal contributions ranged from presenting and management to scholarly work to producing tap festivals, touring shows or commercial choreography. Other interviewees had impacted the field by generating a "buzz" about tap through performances and artist collaborations. Currently, only a few interviewees are professionally involved with tap.

Presenting: The Context for Today's Market

Interviews spoke candidly about the realities of the presenting world, in order to help the tap field learn to approach presenters more effectively. They revealed that there is a marked contrast between presenters' past experiences with tap and their current level of exposure, influenced by the funding cuts at the NEA and the death of many of master artists.

One consistent finding emerged from most interviews. Even agents and presenters who care deeply about tap find themselves without guidance on up and coming artists whose careers they could follow and eventually book. Presenters and agents lack a reliable source for this kind of information. A vicious cycle exists for tap: presenters' low exposure to tap artists limits bookings, which in turn limits exposure. Presenters lack exposure to tap, particularly contemporary tap artists; in fact, interviewees reported seeing tap just once or twice a year, if that often, and usually their viewing was limited to Savion. By all accounts, Savion Glover was the exception to interviewees' lack of awareness – all were familiar with his work, and most had seen him perform in the last year or so. One interviewee summed up the lack of name recognition and visibility as a vicious cycle: "Artists are not known, so they're not booked, so presenters do not know them." This leaves many presenters unaware of what is new or cutting edge in tap.

Through many of the interviews, there was an underlying conviction that champions are needed to vouch for the work of tap artists to presenters, agents and even funders.

Presenters are strongly influenced by each other's programming decisions and look to the choices of other leaders in the field before booking artists. Several believed that these strong patterns of influence, if used strategically, could work to the field's benefit by raising tap's visibility in the eyes of presenters at large. More long term, these efforts could also bring new tap artists into the circle of those who have become a "safe bet" for presenters. Several suggested the formation of a peer working group of national tap leaders with strong reputations, including artists and current and former presenters. Interviewees wondered if ITA (or another organization) could play a role by facilitating gatherings for a consortium of four to five presenters nationally. The consortium could undertake projects such as commissioning for emerging and established

artists, developing contextual materials and presenting a high-quality showcase of tap artists at booking conferences like the Association of Performing Arts Presenters.⁷

Interviewees also urged the tap field to understand the following key points. Presenters receive massive amounts of promotion materials every day and frequently begin relationships with artists and research their work years before booking them. Representing several art forms on a reduced schedule of events proves challenging and, presenters have to sell tickets and be accountable in other ways.

Barriers to Booking: Factors that Affect Tap’s Success

Building on their descriptions of their own working environment, interviewees were asked in great depth about their reticence to book tap dance. They were encouraged to be as frank as possible. Their comments generated the following list of “barriers,” or factors that make it difficult to present tap.

- **The decline in overall dance presenting has implications for the tap field.** With the exception of a small handful of dance-only presenters, dance already makes up a small percentage of any season and these decreases are being felt across many dance forms.
- **The booking costs for dance in general are expensive.** One interviewee explained that “It is really hard to get presenters to spend \$15,000-20,000 on a dance company. Money is very tight right now. Their perception has to be that somehow they will be able to sell tickets.” Another agreed: the cost is “more a variable of visibility and name recognition of the artist [and] the presenter’s willingness to take a risk.”
- **Interviewees observed with regret and respect that tap is seen by the broader world as an outdated art form and can be perceived as passé.** Consequently, many presenters are not interested in booking it because they think “I know what it is and it’s all the same.” Specifically, hoofing and jazz tap are the least understood and appreciated by the broader world. One agent who had represented such forms encountered a lack of interest because presenters did not know who the artists were.
- **Tap’s links to commercial entertainment limits understanding of the breadth of the art form.** As nearly everyone in the U.S. grows up with some level of exposure to the stereotypical images of tap dance seen on television or in musical theatre; their preconceived notions can act as barriers to a real understanding of tap. Since the advent of Savion as a profitable solo figure, presenters value tap primarily for its commercial possibilities with an attitude that “If you book it, you should be able to make money off of it.” His success, though, has not translated into increasing interest in other artists.

⁷ The Association of Performing Arts Presenters is also commonly referred to as APAP or Arts Presenters, both of which are used in this report. This annual booking conference is the largest in the world and meets each January in New York City.

- **Interviewees described how the perception of tap as amateur may relate to the lack of value for popular art forms and partially account for tap's underrepresentation.** Tap struggles to be accepted among the fine arts due to its "popular" nature, and associations such as children's recitals and teenage tap classes.
- **Interviewees described the pros and cons of solo versus ensemble formats.** Opinions varied; while some thought a solo show might be more attractive due to lower costs and the possibility of presenting in a smaller theater, interviewees had concerns about the ability of soloists to sustain evening-length performances. Specific frustrations were mentioned such as artists' poor choices in program content and long-winded evenings that lack structure.
- **Opinions were divided about whether improvised versus choreographed tap poses a barrier.** Some thought that the majority of audiences wouldn't be capable of observing the difference in a performance; others felt improvised tap requires more risk-taking and challenges a presenter's typical approach to marketing an event. Several thought that tap deserved to take its place alongside jazz music and that improvisation should be considered one of the form's great strengths: "It's the art, part of the magic of it, folks go to jazz concerts to see the spontaneous."
- **Many said that tap artists' lack of management and different expectations is a major barrier in their booking success.** They cited problems such as artists' last minute decisions about performances and the fact that few artists have staff who can send out videos, photos, descriptions of their work, accurate costs or fees, and technical specifications. Tap artists are accustomed to working in festivals and commercial venues, which creates a "disconnect with the business of nonprofit presenting." Differences in expectations and guiding principles can also make working together difficult: "[Tap agents from the commercial world] are looking at the bottom line profit...and nonprofits are looking for artistic quality. Commercial agents are looking at 'making deals' and we don't do that." Interviewees said that a primary goal should be to find one or several agents who would agree to represent a few tap artists. The few unfortunate experiences that presenters have had with artists can deter them and other presenters from booking tap.
- **Interviewees expressed mixed opinions about specific flooring and acoustic requirements as barriers to presenting tap.** About half said that the cost of renting or buying a specific kind of flooring for tap was a barrier. Others felt that tap flooring required research, but was "not a hard problem, just something we had to budget for."
- **Poor-quality writing is also an issue for all dance forms, and the lack of print media coverage hinders audience growth,** but most agreed that the state of writing is no worse for tap than for any other dance form. Improving the state of dance writing requires effort on the part of both artists and writers. As one said, "All of the arts groups forget that what gets news is *news*, not promotion." Several offered examples of current efforts that are positively impacting writing about tap including *Dancer Magazine's* significant

coverage. Suzanne Carbonneau's training program for critics at the American Dance Festival was lauded as vital.

- **Some interviewees thought that tap's over-reliance on its past can obscure their awareness of innovation by contemporary artists.** There was consensus that general audiences lack knowledge of tap history, and over half of the interviewees believed that audiences would *not* be interested in learning much about the art form's heritage. The sentimentality that artists may feel in remembering the elders, whom they knew well and who were wonderful performers, does not translate for audiences who are not familiar with the tap masters. In addition, presenters whose mission statements focus on contemporary, rather than historical, art forms are deterred by the tap field's insistence on the primacy of its history. One presenter who books some tap feels that audiences might be more apt to make connections to historical and contemporary artists if they are presented in innovative ways, "which is why we need to educate ourselves more so that we are not only better at presenting it but selling it to our audiences."

Booking Advice for Artists

Several offered advice to artists about approaching presenters and communicating clearly. Many said they receive few materials from tap artists and those that they do receive either don't look professional or are not compelling enough to warrant further research. They urged artists to improve the quality of booking materials and to get them to presenters. They advised artists to be patient in developing relationships. One agent explained, "Rarely will [presenters] pick up the phone after watching the first DVD and book." The interviewee emphasized that "This is a two-, three-, if not five-year process...not a quick fix." A few interviewees said they would be open to representing tap in the future, with one describing the likelihood as "very high."

The following are some basic guidelines for creating good press kits, culled from interviewees' responses: keep press kits basic and straightforward; include well-written narrative biographies; provide a DVD; and include high-quality photos.

Quality

Virtually all interviewees brought up quality as a concern. They did not wish to offend, and hoped the field could use this feedback constructively. In discussing what defines high-quality tap, interviewees noted technique, musicality, innovation, artistic expression and connection with the audience. They gave several glowing examples of top-quality artists in the tap field. The legendary Jimmy Slyde was mentioned by a majority of interviewees and is clearly looked to as a standard of excellence. Dianne Walker was lauded for her technical skill and musicality. Many interviewees painted vivid pictures of Savion Glover's performances and clearly admired his achievements in pushing the form forward: "Savion does incredibly complicated rhythms...because he's an unbelievable dancer." Younger artists, such as Jason Samuels Smith, were seen as beginning to come into their own.

Using the example of Steve Condos who held audiences "in the palm of his hand," this interviewee argued that audiences are fully capable of hearing and appreciating quality. Another

echoed this sentiment: “The average ear of the American teenager, the complexity of rhythms they are listening to on a daily basis is staggering, sophisticated, complex.” The problem, as one described, is that “there is this kind of egalitarianism that is holding the field back.” Another interviewee with a broad dance perspective explained, “It’s the same issue in all dance forms. There are strikingly wide ranges of quality in choreography and performance. It is not unique to tap – [it’s] the democratization of dance – everyone thinks they can do it because they’ve done a bit of it and want to say something. [But] the cream rises.”

Marketing Potential and Ideas

Once interviewees had laid out the barriers, they were forthcoming and enthusiastic in offering many solutions. The vast majority of them, including those with background in nonprofit arts and commercial entertainment, felt that high-quality tap is an extremely engaging art form. Tap can draw from popular appeal with audiences, especially as compared to other dance forms that have never bridged the gap to popular culture. They shared their firsthand observations of audience responses. One stated, “It has universal appeal – the sound is interesting, the movement, and the magic of making those sounds with our feet. It’s an Americana art form.” If more regular performance opportunities are created, interviewees believed tap’s audience would grow.

Interviewees cited numerous examples of tap’s crossover appeal and its ability to reach diverse target audiences. Tap, with its ties to the entertainment world as well as to music and other dance forms, could potentially draw from these other audiences if they knew more about tap and had more opportunities to see performances. One example is *Classical Savion*, which combined classical music and tap in an innovative way, and was “a real breakthrough, very intelligent, and might attract presenters who would not have thought about tap otherwise.”

African American Audiences. “Having African Americans take pride in its development is a great opportunity. That could be used to great effect in New York City... [and other cities] where jazz has its roots.”

Youth Demographic. For this important demographic for presenters, “what tap has... is a pool of younger artists who can relate to younger audiences... with a vocabulary and comfort level and jargon that is more in line with the world students are coming from... If you can take advantage of youth culture and pop culture and pop music... than you can reach audiences.”

Multigenerational Demographic. Several saw the potential of connections between the younger artists and the older generation.

Tap Students in Dance Studios and Former Dancers. A target audience might exist among those who trained in tap dance as kids.

Interviewees repeatedly wished for major group productions that would showcase artists of the highest quality and tour nationally. They thought these “packages” would make a significant, positive difference in their appeal to presenters. Several interviewees suggested ways of packaging and presenting larger productions successfully. They offered their suggestions on: 1)

The best production formats, such as an evening featuring a roster of solos, trios, and small groups; 2) The narrative form, such as was used in Noise Funk; 3) Contextualizing performances with written materials and pre-show tap films; and 4) Putting tap on a national scale through a well-constructed tour or festival. Several interviewees thought that having a presenters' subsidy would help to encourage tap bookings. This "incentive money" would be very influential with presenters.

A range of audience development materials could provide context, create richer experiences, and help significantly in generating interest in the art form. Such materials could be distributed via the ITA's website. Suggested audience development materials included a tap DVD-presentation that could be shown prior to a performance; a children's guide; a syllabus or teacher guide; interactive pre-show talks and program notes; a compendium of tap writing; and a tap history, particularly if presented in an appealing format.

Interviewees believed that the tap community has many unique, positive aspects of which it can be proud, and they spoke with passion about their experiences working with it. As one presenter recalled about a residency with Savion Glover, "The energy of the [tap] community that was fueling our efforts [was] phenomenal. Once they felt they could trust us, [we were] invited into a family and the cross generational learning and respect with the artists was quite inspiring." Working with elder tap artists was a big perk for a number of interviewees: "Of all the dancers I have worked with, the tap dancers are the ones that have personally taught me so much about living, especially the older ones. Through their lives and work and struggles and generosity and wit and dancing, I feel that just being around them was an amazing education." The tap community offers its younger generation both genuine concern and enthusiastic support. One described tap artists saying, "I have always found [tap artists] easy to work with. [They have] a fun attitude about the art form, with people showing each other steps – a love of the art, a much more playful and fun approach that can be used and harnessed as part of an overall program." Another interviewee learned from working with tap artists, the spontaneity is what makes it so special. "It's about the moment."

Though interviewees felt strongly about the tap community's interest and appeal, they also spoke about a number of persistent issues that are detrimental to tap's image to the outside world. Only a few commented on the ITA, and most were grateful for its existence and the dedication of its leadership, calling the executive director a "gem". Some artists complain of being shortchanged in terms of gigs, pay rates and visibility, as compared to artists in other dance forms, but presenters wonder if the tap community knows how little artists in other dance forms are paid. Additionally, the tap community is perceived as resistant to accepting help, and has thus to some degree alienated itself from other dance forms and the performing arts field at large. One specific issue mentioned is that the tap community relies on and even clings to its history, and carefully guards the videos, photos and other historical documents that exist. Artists store tap materials in their homes. The problem is, "Tap relies very heavily on their heritage but there is no place to go and find the information."

Funding: Context and Ideas

While only a few of them are funders, it is important to note that many of the interviewees have ample experience at obtaining funding. They agreed that favorable funding decisions for tap will likely be made by someone who cares about the art form and wants to invest in its future. Though it will be difficult, finding one or several funders who will act as champions for tap is an important goal. To get on funders' priority lists, tap will have to become more visible and offer appealing projects to funders; it is highly unlikely that individual artists will get support on their own. Interviewees acknowledged with great appreciation that the NEA has been the only consistent supporter of the development of tap. As one interviewee who is an artist added, "It is thrilling to me that as an American artist, that somehow the NEA has an appreciation for the field of dance I work in."

Interviewees agreed that most funders lack exposure to tap or its history and this shortfall will need to be addressed in cultivating funding. As one said, "They need to see it!" Likewise, tap artists need to become better informed about the process of seeking funding and what appeals to foundations. Part of the reason that funders do not support tap is that "They are not asked to support it. They just don't get applications from tap organizations. Or if they do, a lot of the applications are not well prepared." Another explained, "You have to look good on paper." The first step in developing potential funding support for tap is to educate funders, said interviewees, particularly in these areas: tap's history; its regional appeal; local projects; projects that involve presenters; the wide impact of tap (through a participation study); individual's personal experiences with tap that could lead to donor support; multigenerational artists; and its capacity to reach target audiences. As one interviewee said, "If there is an exciting generation, a case needs to be made to funders about them." Funders are most likely not aware of the huge number of tap festivals across the country, which would provide great opportunities for partnership and interest potential supporters.

Interviewees thought that the following case statement would support the tap field.

- **Tap is one of the few truly American art forms.** There are clear parallels between tap and jazz music, which has recently found increased national support, through both the NEA and other national private funders. As one interviewee explained, "The appeal for the NEA is that it is an American form [and] broadens the diversity of the dance portfolio" it supports. A similar case can also be made to help secure tap bookings, because as another said, "It doesn't hurt for presenters to feel pride in that they are helping to preserve and extend and keep thriving a true American form."
- **Tap is an exciting art form.** Interviewees pointed to a unique energy in tap, and particularly in the innovative work of young artists today, that one described as "some of the freshest and most compelling." Others noted that tap is "a multi-sensory, exciting, high-energy art form" with sound and visuals; the improvisatory nature of some tap makes it stand out; and that it can embody a wide variety of emotions.

- **Audiences easily connect with tap performances.** The form’s ties to commercial entertainment, the widespread study of and participation in tap, and its multiethnic heritage create multiple ways for audiences to connect. One explained, audiences “are moved powerfully by the athleticism, expressiveness and rhythm.”
- **Tap has positive ties to the commercial/entertainment industry.** Through Hollywood films, television and advertising, people around the world have been exposed to tap. The tap field can capitalize on this, educating funders about tap’s “global reach, interdisciplinary nature, [and] appeal to audiences.”
- **Tap has a multiethnic heritage, rooted in a complex and interesting history.** Tap is “seen as a diversity bridge” with a rich cultural history that appeals to people of many different backgrounds.
- **Tap is a flexible and intimate art form to present.** Since many acts feature individual artists in their own right, tap has a flexibility that is not possible with most ballet or modern dance companies. An intimate art form, in which the “fourth wall” that separates performers from the audience is frequently absent, tap can extend into the audience and appear within non-traditional spaces.
- **Tap has a strong connection to music.** “Tap has a way of hooking into music in a way that other dance forms cannot,” as one said. Another explained, “The message comes right out of the rhythm,” which requires performers’ precision, musicality and improvisation.
- **Dance is becoming more mainstream and percussive forms are appealing to broad audiences.** Dance is reclaiming its place in popular culture with new television shows like *Dancing with the Stars* and *American Idol*; movies like *Mad Hot Ballroom*; and Broadway shows like *Stomp* and *Noise/Funk*. Several interviewees hoped that tap could ride this wave of increasing visibility for dance and create resurgence in interest in the art form.
- **Tap artists have an engaging presence when working in communities and often teach extensively.** Many interviewees spoke to the generosity of tap artists as teachers and mentors. Artists’ passion for teaching, and eagerness to share and learn from one another, creates an emphasis on relationships between generations.

National Strategies to Support the Art Form

Interviewees shared their own ideas for taking advantage of tap’s strengths, catalyzing change, and accelerating progress.

National Organizations and Advocacy

- Increase tap advocacy efforts. Through gathering data about tap participation and its economic impact, tap could be repositioned in a way that creates renewed enthusiasm on the part of presenters and funders.
- Form a new national network for tap organizations and artists. Bringing together a large cross-section of people as well as funders and representatives from service organizations could create more communication and connection within the tap field. Some suggested a “national concerted effort” would create opportunities for ongoing dialogue. Others suggested looking to Dance/USA as a model service organization, or getting tap involved in programs that already exist.
- Begin to establish a home for tap as a national institution. Jazz at Lincoln Center was looked to as a potential model for the tap field due to the way that it has dramatically increased visibility and support for jazz. Intense activities “[concentrated] in one place” could “raise awareness.”
- Support a repertory company for tap dance, which would act as a national repository for the art form and would help change public perception of tap.
- Convene a Tap Heritage Forum and encourage preservation of materials. Such a forum could not only discuss tap’s history, but identify strategies for preserving historical materials perhaps through a “major repository” that could assure that archives “be stored in environmentally correct places.”
- Establish a fund for elder tappers. Given the tap field’s strong respect for the work of master tappers, a fund for aging dancers and dancers in crisis should be among the field’s priorities.
- Support tap writers. Fellowship funds to support writers travelling to different festivals could generate critical reviews, which could later be compiled in a print or online publication.

Marketing

- Create a tap DVD for presenters. An annual compilation of the year’s best tap artists could be distributed.
- Develop and/or expand university tap programs, since for the most part, tap is not taught at the college or university level.
- Create and distribute audience development materials to contextualize performances. In general, interviewees were most enthusiastic about a DVD and the children’s guide, though several thought that all of the materials covered above would be useful.
- Develop a residency model that would work for tap. Residencies could help build audiences for tap at the local level and create new funding opportunities for the art form. Tap artists can look to modern dance and other forms for examples, or to Jacob’s Pillow’s residency led by Jimmy Slyde and Dianne Walker, that was made possible through funding from the Wallace Foundation.

- Market tap artists rather than tap as a form. As one interviewee suggested, “If you think about ballet, you don’t market ballet as a form, you market the Joffrey.”
- Redefine tap for audiences by highlighting improvisation. Interviewees suggested that presenters highlight tap’s spontaneity since, “[Audiences] have a preconceived notion of it as a form they completely know, rather than one where there is continuing innovation.”
- Raise visibility for tap via TV spots, perhaps through a pro bono agency.

Presenting

- Engage and increase visibility for the younger generation of tap artists. As one interviewee said, there is no question that a next generation of exceptionally talented tap artists exists and mentioned by name Kendrick Jones, Jason Samuels Smith, Chloe Arnold, Joseph Wiggan, Ayodele Casel, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Ali Bradley, and Andrew Nemr.
- Curate a tap showcase at the Association for Performing Arts Presenters’ Annual Conference (APAP). A well-produced tap event at APAP would be an important step in increasing visibility for the younger generation; ITA could work to interest producers or raise seed money for the project. However, as one cautioned, simply performing at conferences is not going to make a strong impact on presenters: “It is not just the booth, but the success of the booth depends on the relationships you develop for the year or two before.” And, in order to be successful at such conferences, tap artists will have to make a strong commitment to creating well-packaged, high-quality performances that are designed to convince presenters.
- Invest in one or several creative producers to create and tour a major national tap event. As one described, a creative producer “would put a show together, pick and choose among the works, and determine what would work best with your particular venue and audience.”
- Develop a travel fund for presenters to attend tap festivals. One interviewee suggested that sometimes the APAP travel fund is not used in its entirety, and perhaps could help support some travel to tap festivals where presenters could meet artists and observe classes.
- Look at the crossover potential for tap to collaborate with music performances. As one interviewee said, “Trying to convince presenters to incorporate tap into jazz music is an extremely strategic way to try to get audiences to think differently about tap.” With more emphasis on jazz than ever before, through NEA interest and the new building at Lincoln Center, a greater alignment and cooperation with the art form could serve the tap field well. Tap artists and jazz ensembles could be presented on the same evening, or a collaboration could be the basis of a touring show.
- Recruit theaters to showcase tap and percussive dance.

Professional Development

- Recruit mentors to work with younger artists. To encourage and hone the skills of the next generation of tap artists, “give the young artists performance experience in informal settings and...to have someone look at their work and talk about it.” Funding would be needed to cover basic costs such as airfare.

- Create recordings of tap. Both as a tool for improving skills and potentially as a marketable product, recordings could assist some to “learn their craft well.” A Guggenheim award supported Jimmy Slyde’s choreo-audio project which is designed to help young artists fine tune their technique for recording and may one day result in recordings that could be listened to as music.

Funding

- Create mechanisms funders can support. Since funders frequently can’t support individuals, interviewees stressed the appeal of larger structures or entities like the ITA: “They haven’t been asked to fund it, or when they have, it’s not a mechanism they can support.”
- Look to jazz models and other ideas from the music world.⁸ Several successful models could be used for tap. The Jazz Network, coverage of jazz on Morning Edition, and support for National Public Radio and the Smithsonian Institution worked to “heighten the profile of jazz [music] in a profound way.” Replication of the Meet the Composer program was also suggested.
- Highlight the marketing and “buzz” potential of tap. Provide funders with guidance on how tap renews enthusiasm for the arts and reaches new audiences.
- Solicit possible funders. A few interviewees had ideas for funders that could be approached about supporting tap.

Consultant Recommendations

This planning process generated a wealth of information from the tap field, as well as the broader arts field. In addition to tap artists and those who organize festivals and other events, the process proactively engaged agents, advocates, presenters, funders, writers, teachers, historians, commercial managers, and administrators. It resulted in 30 hours of interviews, which generated 210 pages of transcripts; about 400 pages from 33 surveys of 25 artists and tap organizers; and an estimated 200 pages of additional information including meeting notes, reports and grant applications. As indicated earlier, the nature of research conducted in any community is that it generates a variety of viewpoints that do not always agree. While some of the information may have been new to the reader, and even difficult to hear, it was offered thoughtfully and constructively by individuals who collectively have an extraordinary amount of wisdom, insight and experience and who want to help the tap field succeed.

A national plan is geared around that which cannot be accomplished by any one organization alone, whether a festival, company or service organization. Rather, it is designed to address the goals of a field overall. *Together, the field can realize accomplishments that no single organization could on its own.* Although the extensive research clearly points to a number of needs, the challenge is to identify and prioritize the few recommendations that will be: a) most

⁸ See Appendix I in the full report for a summary of the National Jazz Network, a very successful model that received national funding.

useful to the tap field; b) doable within the constraints of nonprofit budgets and staffing, even if new funds can be raised; and c) urgent, responding to critical needs that affect the field now.

One reality that has affected progress, to date, is that the tap field operates on extremely limited staff and wears multiple hats. A handful of individuals serve as the chief artistic educators, promoters and advocates for the form. There currently exists only one service organization with modest staffing and resources; it is yet to be determined if, or how, ITA would be involved in the recommendations. And, it is clear that there are limitations to what could be taken on by those who currently staff organizations, including tap festivals. Therefore, it is assumed that the recommendations below will require additional involvement and assistance in the form of funding as well as human and other resources.

While the need for funding should not dictate the recommendations, it is important to remember that funders are much more inclined to support well-researched projects that are specific and measurable. The timeline to complete them would to range from one to five years, though some of them will be ongoing for a longer time period.

Collaboration/Infrastructure Among Tap Festivals & Other Tap Presenters

Launch a formal network among tap festivals and other tap presenters for the mutual benefit of their own communities and the field overall. The network would hold an annual national meeting for festival leadership; determine other areas for mutual gain; and fundraise collaboratively to cover these costs.

As the research from tap artists and organizers points out—both quantitatively and qualitatively—the tap festivals are the nexus for much of the activity that takes place in the tap field and have supported its growth over the past decade. Moreover, the festivals are the de facto infrastructure for the tap field (which is quite different from ballet and modern dance, which have formed hundreds of professional companies and have a national service organization that provides a range of year-round services and meetings).

What the festivals lack are a) a mechanism for collaboration, where they can meet and work together to address their own needs, b) a forum for interacting with other dance presenters who are, or may be, willing to present tap, and c) a national identity, which greatly aides in increasing awareness and interest on the part of presenters and funders. The tap field can begin by building on this viable and valuable resource by forming a Tap Presenting Network (TPN) [working title] of the largest six to eight festivals.

Next Steps

- Host the first annual meeting of the Tap Presenters Network to share information, begin to assess the needs of the network as a group, and identify how those needs might be addressed.
- Tap festivals should commit to providing annual statistics, in order to build a national awareness and fact base for their breadth and impact. *Such information is critical to obtaining funding for any collaborative activities that might be undertaken.*

- Provide Tap festivals with an annual fee subsidy to identify and support a small number of touring artists.
- Explore the model of the Jazz Network for possible replication.

Booking and Presenting

Increasing performance opportunities will require responsibility at all levels over the long-term. The field must commit to undertaking a series of steps to generate bookings for tap dance, including building relationships with presenters and agents.

Much of the research centered on this top concern: to understand more about why tap was not being booked and determine what might be done to increase the amount of professional presenting. The challenges voiced by dance leaders must be taken into careful consideration, and solutions sought to overcome them. The majority of interviewees thought that audience materials would help significantly in generating interest in the art form and target audiences, including children, teachers, and even agents/marketing staff of presenters, as well as general audiences. The ITA's website could be the repository for some of this material, which could be used by all artists. In addition, artists are encouraged to develop their own materials. Booking and presenting recommendations are presented in three categories: 1) tasks that individual artists and companies could accomplish on their own; 2) national marketing to support and promote the art form; and 3) national efforts to present a specific group of artists.

1. Next Steps for Artists

- Artists can share the findings from this report with their peers.
- As a group, artists could develop a guide for expectations and standards of professional presentation, to make clear the difference between presentations and "gigs."
- Artists should invest time and money in their booking materials and work to ensure that they meet presenters' needs. Materials should be as brief as possible and address practical concerns such as flooring and acoustic needs; possible programs that provide a sense of improvised or set choreography; testimonials from other presenters; and any flexibility the artists can offer.
- Artists are encouraged to create a DVD of their work, which is a first step in motivating presenters to come see a performance.
- Artists are encouraged to obtain feedback on the quality and appropriateness of their work and performance format. The overall structure and length of shows needs to be addressed.
- In their own materials, artists are encouraged to address presenters' need for audience development materials.
- Establish a mentorship program that would offer feedback to artists as they develop their craft and learn about the history of the dance form.
- Train artists in conducting residency activities in addition to performances and classes.
- Finally, and most importantly, artists need to promote themselves to presenters. The materials are only the first step and need to be followed up with phone calls, emails and even in-person meetings.

2. *Next Steps for National Collaborative Marketing Materials*

- Develop a number of materials on tap dance that could be utilized by the broader field to encourage bookings and increase audience understanding and interest. A “Tap Toolkit” could include a piece on the history of tap; an audience guide for adults; a template for a children’s guide; a teacher’s guide; a residency guide; and possibly, a short guide about “how to sell tap performances to your school system.”
- Commission a film or DVD, by a director who understands how to capture dance on film, along with a knowledgeable writer, that could be used as an audience development tool before performances.
- Collaborate with presenters who are interested in booking tap by sharing the mailing lists of tap festivals and other resources.
- Host a series of workshops to review artists’ marketing materials. Facilitated by a knowledgeable agent, a peer feedback system would allow participants to gain insight into how they are coming across to others.
- Consider holding a Tap Booking Boot Camp, possibly in conjunction with the Tap Festivals. This would be a more formalized version of the marketing materials workshop, which would tour to various cities. Research Dance/USA On Tour, which is structured in a similar way. Consider partnering with Dance/USA On Tour to recruit tap artists wherever this program is offered. Provide artists who attend with a Tap Toolkit.

3. *Next Steps for National Booking Efforts*

It is assumed that the ITA or some other entity would assist with these steps.

- Compile a DVD of outstanding tap artists to begin to familiarize presenters and funders with current artistry and generate “buzz” for the art form.
- Explore the range of opportunities to raise visibility and encourage bookings through the Association of Performing Arts Presenters annual conference. In addition to enlightening presenters about tap artists it could educate artists about the booking process. A presence at the conference would need to be considered quickly and could incorporate a panel presentation; a booth representing six artists; two showcases – one in a nightclub and one in a proscenium theater; and the release of this plan.
- Explore any opportunities to showcase tap through Dance/USA. This could take place at their next council meeting or Roundtable in June of 2008, at the National Performing Arts Conference, a multi-disciplinary meeting to take place in Denver. Perhaps the annual meeting of the TPN could be held before or after this conference.
- Host a meeting of the agents, probably in New York, who might be interested in booking tap.
- Work with a creative producer to put together one or several tap tours, which feature artists of the highest quality.
- Secure funding to offer a subsidy to dance presenters (other than tap festivals) who book tap dance.

National Advocacy and Infrastructure Development

The ITA and other dance leaders who support the form are encouraged to “infiltrate”—politely yet aggressively—into national gatherings. They should deliver the

message that tap is alive and well—that this vibrant art form can boast of high-quality artists, both senior and emerging, and offers many appeals to audiences of all ages.

The findings show that there exists a sizeable gap between the infrastructure for the tap field and other areas of the nonprofit professional arts field. Other areas of the arts field have annual meetings, special interest groups, systems of fee subsidies, granting programs and communication devices. ITA has knowledge of and access to many of these national organizations and their meetings. The level of networking, information sharing and relationship building that happens at these conferences could be extremely useful to the tap field in bridging that gap.

The workload that will be generated by pursuing even a few of these recommendations is considerable. The ITA has been grossly under-resourced for decades. If the ITA is to be responsible for undertaking and accomplishing even a portion of this plan, it will be necessary to develop and secure a healthy operating budget that supports an increased level of activity.

Next Steps for Advocacy

- Develop a “case statement” that promotes tap dance, and adapt its key messages to a variety of uses, including booking, advocacy, education, and funding.
- Experiment with new language to describe the form and the various styles that make up what has been and is now called “tap.” It is interesting that most of the successful touring shows use other language, such as *Stomp*, *Noise/Funk*, etc. Even *Tap Dogs* gives a twist to the word “tap.”
- Aggressively incorporate tap into major national gatherings. Think creatively about the possibilities for showcasing tap dance in a variety of settings such as the annual conferences of Americans for the Arts, the National Association of State Arts Agencies, Very Special Arts, the American Association of Museums, Theater Communications Group or the Society of Arts and Healthcare.
- Approach Americans for the Arts to explore the most appropriate forms of advocacy. This might include conducting a study about the prevalence and popularity of tap dance as an American art form.
- Hold a national meeting in the next year, for a select group of interviewees from this planning process, to review the plan and discuss next steps.
- Hold a Tap Heritage Forum, to address the critical issues of documentation and preservation.

Next Steps for Infrastructure

- Consider starting a Tap Council as part of Dance/USA. Dance/USA would help to fight the isolation that can exist for the tap field.
- Closely assess the current capacity and skill base of the ITA and commit to growing the organization or developing the necessary infrastructure in a different organization.

Quality

The tap field must address the issue of quality carefully yet responsibly. If it desires higher visibility, it must maintain the highest standards for its professional artists and encourage professional development and mentorship for those who are still developing their craft.

Throughout its history the tap field has produced outstanding artists who have inspired countless audiences. Yet throughout all areas of the research—from artists, festivals and national interviews—a consistent concern was raised about the quality level of artists who are promoted as professional. Without an honest assessment of quality, and the setting of some standards, there is little chance that presenters will change their associations with the tap field and begin to book tap. The issue of quality has implications for many of the recommendations in this report. Some of the services and programs described above can serve many, while others can only serve a few (at least in the beginning). It is a sensitive moment when the tap field as a whole needs to build trust and relationships with presenters, which means promoting a small group of outstanding artists. Applying rigor now will benefit the broader field later.

Next Steps

- Establish one or several ways to give national recognition to artists of exceptional quality.
- Consider developing a DVD of six to eight outstanding tap artists.
- Consider other ways to publicize high quality artists perhaps through a public relations firm that would be willing to offer pro bono services. Or, corporations such as the Gap might feature young tap dancers in their commercials, since they wear the style of clothing that this corporation sells.

Tap as an Institution

Explore the possibilities of institutionalizing tap in a prominent location. That entity would undertake centralized efforts to promote and serve the art form. The long-term goal is to recognize tap as an important part of American culture. Among those that might be considered are Jacob's Pillow, the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center and the American Dance Festival. These institutions would offer built-in performance opportunities; archives; and an audience that draws from the general public and national dance leaders, including press and funders. This would be a five-to ten-year process, and might begin with a performance project or festival.

Next Steps

- Explore options for, and hold initial discussions with, institutions that might be interested in establishing a tap institution.
- Perhaps a university or service organization could serve as a partner in institutionalizing tap. A fund for guest teachers could be established, to support master artists to teach in select colleges for a semester. Perhaps it could start with a pilot program in several schools. The National Dance Education Organization or the International Association of Blacks in Dance may be involved.

Community Building

The tap community as a whole is encouraged to develop and maintain positive working relationships. Surveys and interviews conveyed the hope that the field would rise above feelings of competition. Maintaining a positive attitude will be important in implementing many of the recommendations in this report. There is enormous potential for the field to coalesce and grow, if enthusiasm is channeled in productive and innovative ways.

Next Steps

- Develop guiding principles and standards of conduct for the tap field, and encourage artists and others to sign on to them.
- Circulate the findings from this report to artists and tap organizers.
- Draw from the wisdom and leadership of the elders in the field to instill a spirit of respect for all who make up the tap community. Honi Coles, Gregory Hines, Jimmy Slyde and Steve Condos often spoke about respect and tolerance, making clear that the enjoyment and sharing of the art was key.

Funding

The ITA and other groups are encouraged to share this report with funders and aggressively begin to fundraise for select projects. This report contains a wealth of information, perspectives and ideas about the strengths, impacts, circumstances and needs of the tap field. Such a compendium of information about its impact and needs has not existed before. One finding in the report is that funders lack awareness of the tap field, including its prevalence in local communities; the multiple audiences who see it; and the outstanding artists who are creating work. And, the tap field lacks definitive numbers on its own impact, such as audience size. This report should go a long way toward educating funders who are interested in serving the arts, and dance field, about the particular needs of tap. Moreover, it gives an overview of the needs of the professional tap field, in ways that can educate funders. And, artists and festivals within the tap field should be able to utilize it in making the case for their own local impact.

Next Steps

- Circulate the draft version of this report with select interviewees.
- Share this report with national funders and obtain their feedback and ideas.
- Arrange for meetings with some of the interviewees to determine their areas of interest.
- Decide on several (one to three) national projects that should be undertaken in the next one to three years. Develop project descriptions for each one.
- Encourage tap festivals to utilize the findings from this report to fundraise in their local areas.
- Use the information in this report as a tool to educate funders and advocate for the art form.

Other Ideas

- The tap community, perhaps through the ITA or festivals, etc. could partner with existing organizations such as DCA, CORD, SDHS, ADF's dance critics institute, oral history organizations, the Dance Heritage Coalition, etc. to encourage the education of people already writing about dance/the arts to write about tap and to encourage the development of new tap writers.
- The ITA could revamp its communications strategies and find funding to upgrade its current publications and ways of communicating with the field including its website, *On Tap* magazine, and the creation of a tap journal.

Callahan Consulting for the Arts

Callahan Consulting for the Arts helps artists, arts organizations and funders realize their vision through a range of services that includes strategic planning, resource development, evaluation, and philanthropic counsel. Founded by Suzanne Callahan in 1996, the firm has expanded over the past ten years to include strategic partnerships with senior consultants as well as freelance writer/administrators. The firm has attracted a wide client base of small to mid-sized arts ensembles, large institutions, presenting organizations, foundations, and national associations. Among its New York clients have been: Dance Theater Workshop (for the New York State Dance Force), the Joyce Theater, Urban Bush Women, Gina Gibney Dance, Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Its national client base includes Dance/USA, the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, the Chicago Community Trust, the Kenan Institute for the Arts and The Pew Charitable Trusts. Its local client base includes the Washington Performing Arts Society, the Washington Ballet, Washington Shakespeare Company, World Arts Focus, the Carl M. Freeman Foundation and In Good Company. Artistic disciplines have included dance of a wide variety of forms and styles, including ballet, modern, tap, African, Latin-influenced, middle eastern, swing/lindy and stepping; contemporary, experimental and historical theater; spoken word; and orchestral, choral, chamber, gospel and Latin music. In the past decade, the firm has enjoyed growing recognition. Founder Suzanne Callahan is a regular trainer, college educator, panelist, and guest speaker and her new book *Singing Our Praises* just received a major national award. She has also been published in the areas of fundraising, planning, and philanthropy. Callahan Consulting for the Arts offers its clients a wealth of experience in national policy and philanthropy; professional certification in fundraising; graduate-level training and trend-setting expertise in evaluation; and a thorough and effective approach to assessment and strategic planning. Most importantly, the firm prides itself on its track record and concrete results in its key service areas, and the strong relationships it has developed with its clients.

Suzanne Callahan, CFRE, Founder. Callahan has served as panelist or site visitor for the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation and the NEA, and was Senior Specialist for the Dance Program at the NEA for nine years, where she gained a broad understanding of dance artists, presenters, and service organizations. A Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE), she has spoken and published for national and local arts organizations and funders including, in addition to those listed above, the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, the Association Foundation Group, and American University's Arts Management Program. Callahan holds an M.A. in Dance Education and a Certificate in Fundraising from George Washington University, a B.A. in Social Policy from Northwestern University, and completed post-graduate study in evaluation and research methods at George Washington University.

Brooke Belott, Client Associate. Brooke Belott brings experience in dance, administration, writing, research and publishing. Based in the New York City area, she currently serves as Development Associate at Movement Research, is a freelance grantwriter and performs with choreographer/performance artist Ed Tyler. Previously, she worked in development at Second Stage Theatre in New York City and as Publications Assistant at Equals Three Communications in Bethesda, MD. She graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a double major in Dance and English, in 2002. Brooke played a major role in the completion of the book *Singing Our Praises*.

Jane Jerardi, Client Associate. A DC-based choreographer and artist, Jane Jerardi has worked for the past seven years with a variety of organizations to support artists. She served as arts coordinator at the British Council, connecting US audiences to contemporary British artists and now manages programs for the Society for the Arts in Healthcare. Her experience includes strategic planning, grant writing, communications strategy and website development, as well as research and writing. In addition to producing and presenting her own work, she is trained as a facilitator for artists' workshops with The Field and she teaches yoga to adults. She recently received a commission for a new work from the Washington Performing Arts Society.