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THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACKS IN DANCE RECEIVES \$500,000 MELLON FOUNDATION GRANT

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) President and CEO, Denise Saunders Thompson, today announced a \$500,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The grant is part of the Foundation’s Comprehensive Organizational Health Initiative, designed to strengthen the organizational health of small and midsize arts institutions through comprehensive financial analysis and capacity building financial support. The project will provide a phased initiative to begin in-depth pilot planning that will inform subsequent phases to strengthen IABD’s infrastructure and its member organizations capacity-building over an extended time frame.

Phase I of the initiative, includes an in-depth field diagnostic and educational program, as well as capacity building and financial sustainability for IABD itself, resulting in immediate infrastructure and operating support to develop a business model. Thirty-five (35) member organizations will also participate in a sector landscape study to include a financial diagnostic, needs assessment analysis, and presentation of findings.

As part of the overall initiative, IABD will also partner with the Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF) to pilot a capitalization project that moves beyond a conversation regarding the importance of equitable funding practices into strategy and action. NFF, with assistance by IABD President and CEO, Denise Saunders Thompson and Baraka Sele, Independent Arts Consultant, will conduct a collaborative program to deliver methodologies and resources to IABD members to strengthen their organizations. Analytical data, training, and planning for an inclusive and comprehensive blueprint to address long-term stability and capitalization needs will be provided by NFF for these critical dance organizations.

“I am excited about the potential and long-term effects this strategic gift will have on IABD and the Black dance community. For decades, Black dance companies, small to mid-sized, have been marginalized by an arts funding paradigm that was not accessible. The financial challenges these organizations have faced to keep their doors open continue to be significant and now IABD is uniquely positioned to change the course of the tide. We are grateful for The Mellon Foundation’s support and belief in our efforts to move the conversation forward, with action,” states Saunders Thompson.

IABD was founded in 1991 as a direct result of an artistic development grant to Founder/Artistic Executive Director, Joan Myers Brown, of Philadanco!, The Philadelphia Dance Company. Ms. Brown felt that a gathering of the Black Dance Community would serve not only her needs, but also needs of other Black dance professionals. The Founding Members of the Association, Conference and Festival include: [Dayton Contemporary Dance Company](#), [Philadanco](#), [Dallas Black Dance Theatre](#), [Cleo Parker Robinson Dance](#), and [Lula Washington Dance Theatre](#).

As an organization that has been servicing the Black dance community for over twenty-five (25) years with a focus on education, networking, and professional development, IABD is poised to bring to light the

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innovative methodologies of these Black dance organizations, that enabled them to make historic accomplishments in spite of pervasive and sometimes crippling racism as well as systemic financial inequities – utilizing art as a means of protest, survival, and social change. NFF and Baraka Sele, will support Saunders Thompson as thought-partners, leading IABD through this first year of capacity-building.

Denise Saunders Thompson has served as the Chairperson/ Executive Director for seven (7) years in a volunteer capacity and was recently appointed President and CEO by the Board of Directors. She has extensive experience in non-profit and for-profit, established or start-up organizations and has advised organizations on administrative, programmatic and fundraising issues including strategic plans, policy and procedures, communications programs, budgeting and contracts. Currently, she is a Professorial Lecturer for the Graduate Arts Management Degree Program at American University and Founder/ President and CEO of D.d.Saunders & Associates, Inc., a comprehensive fine arts advisory firm offering artist management/ representation, arts producing, consulting, and production services. Saunders Thompson recently concluded 17 years of service at Howard University in the capacities of Professor, Theatre Manager/Producing Artistic Director for the Department of Theatre Arts and Manager of Cramton Auditorium. She serves on the Board of Trustees for Dance/USA, is a member of Actors Equity Association (AEA), and Women of Color in the Arts (WOCA). Mrs. Thompson has been employed with The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Debbie Allen Dance Academy, Alliance Theatre Company, National Black Arts Festival, 1996 Olympic Arts Festival, 1996 Olympics, Lincoln Theatre, Several Dancers Core, the Atlanta Dance Initiative, the Mark Taper Forum, the Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger, and Harrah's Marina Hotel Casino, in administrative and production capacities.

Baraka Sele, a longtime strategic arts consultant to IABD brings a rich knowledge of arts performance and administrative experiences. Prior to being self-employed, she was the Assistant Vice President of Programming at New Jersey Performing Arts Center where she produced NJPAC's Alternate Routes series, which featured artists from New Jersey, the United States and around the world, complemented by educational, humanities and residency programs (1996 - 2011). She has also held leadership positions as the first Artistic Director of Performing Arts at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (1992 - 1996) in San Francisco and Vice President of Performing Arts of The Houston International Festival (1988 - 1992). Besides working as a performing arts curator, consultant, programmer and producer, Sele has served on local, national and international advisory committees, boards and panels for organizations including: Dance/USA; Association of Performing Arts Presenters; International Society of the Performing Arts; National Endowment for the Arts; Vera List Center for Art and Politics/ The New School; Walker Art Center's Global Advisory Committee; the Kennedy Center's African Odyssey Festival, et al. Sele has traveled throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, as well as North and South America. She is frequently a guest speaker at conferences, seminars and universities.

Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, data and analysis from this project will be compiled in order to bring greater awareness to the performing arts and philanthropic fields. For more information visit www.iabdassociation.org/COHI .