

Letter from the NDEO Board President

May 10, 2021



Dear NDEO Membership,

As we come to the end of teacher appreciation week and NDEO's annual #ThankADanceTeacherDay, I take this moment to thank each of you for your work in the dance field and your perseverance in offering dance to your communities during a pandemic. In my last letter, I shared my awe of the resiliency of the NDEO members, and today, your brilliance reminds me of Adam Grant's latest book *Think Again*, which explores the ways that re-thinking can lead not only to adaptability but also to curiosity, innovation, and empowered working relationships. As colleagues across sectors and dance cultures, NDEO and its members demonstrate how creative thinking and innovative action can reinvigorate our classrooms, performances, and community events.

Similar to creative processes in dance, NDEO's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) project has continued to unfold and evolve over the past several months. We had an overwhelming response to the call for participants in this project, and we now have a total of 90 participants engaging in the JEDI audit of the NDEO programs. This group represents NDEO members, the boards of directors, the staff, and members of the NDEO Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) committee. Our consultants, Carmen Marshall and Mary Warren from Maryland Nonprofits, help us maintain focus on the (re)humanization and community building purposes of this project. The JEDI project is both ambitious and comprehensive, and through discussions and preliminary analysis of NDEO programming, the scope was defined to these nine focus areas:

- Awards and Scholarships
- Board and Governance
- Communication
- Conference
- Membership
- National Honor Society for Dance Arts (NHSDA)
- Online Professional Development Institute (OPDI)
- Publishing
- Standards

Each assigned work group will conduct a thorough audit over the summer months that reveals opportunities for re-thinking how people, processes, and programs exist within the holistic structure of NDEO. Maryland Nonprofits will analyze culminating audit data and share a "JEDI Action and Accountability Plan" with NDEO. This plan will guide the organization's strategic priorities for the coming years.

Full circle, this brings us back to resilience. Author of *My Grandmother's Hands*, Resmaa Menakem (2017), articulated that resilience is "not so much a response as it is a way of showing up, a way of tapping into the energies that surround and move through everything in our world" (p. 51). Indeed, NDEO and its membership are showing up to the call for action to become an anti-racist organization. Our community's united energy will generate trust in one another, drive compassion for all humans, and activate our holistic priority of dance education for all.

I welcome discussions and connections with the membership. Please email me at president@ndeo.org if you have ideas or concerns to share.

Sincerely,
Kelly Ferris Lester
NDEO President (2020-2022)
president@ndeo.org

Grant, A. (2021). *Think again: The power of knowing what you don't know*. Viking.

Menkam, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.