



I. GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date November 5, 2025

Contact Information

Organization Name: The Rock School for Dance Education ED/CEO Name: Peter Stark
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Year Incorporated: 1963 Primary Contact Name: Chandler Myer
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Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

☒	Arts, Culture, Heritage	☒	Education, Library	☐	Environment, Animals
☐	Health	☐	Human Services	☐	Social Justice, Civic Engagement
☐	Religion	☐	If other, please describe:		

Mission:

The Rock School develops the whole dancer, enabling students to reach the highest standards of technique and artistry in a nurturing, supportive environment that elevates the art form, the dancer, and the audience.

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):

Chester County, Philadelphia County

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served. (Include Chester County # &/or % served.)

The Rock School annually educates nearly 1,100 young people in its professional and ballet divisions and summer intensives, including locations in Philadelphia and West Chester. Sixty of these students live in the dormitory and eat all their meals at the school from September to June. An additional 1,500 children from Philadelphia's Title 1 schools benefit from the RockReach program.

Inside these numbers lies an impressive diversity rare in the world of ballet education. The vast majority of students—approximately 2,000—come from Pennsylvania. The remaining students represent 45 American states and 16 foreign countries. In 2025, The Rock School will train young dancers from six of the earth's seven continents. The RockReach program, which serves 1,500 Philadelphia children, comprises 89% people of color; race and ethnicity statistics are unavailable for students in the professional and ballet divisions. Additionally, in a field that is overwhelmingly female, The Rock School boasts the largest men's ballet program in the U.S.

Nearly 15% of The Rock School's students—381 young people—attend the West Chester location for their dance training, including school-year and summer intensives. Sixty-one percent of them live in Pennsylvania,

mostly in Chester County. The remaining 29% come from 30 U.S. states and five foreign countries. The West Chester students receive \$195,000 of annual scholarship assistance.

Annual Budget \$6,965,918

79% of budget for program expenses

14% of budget for administrative expenses

7% of budget for fundraising expenses

100% = total

37: # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff

22: # of Board Volunteers

50: # of Active Non-Board Volunteers

400: # of Volunteer Hours

Top 3-5 funding sources:

The William Penn Foundation

Exelon Corporation

Joseph Kennard Skilling Trust

Christopher Ludwick Foundation

Robert and Caro Rock

This grant proposal is for: X Direct Service Programs & General Operating &/or Capacity Building

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:

☐	Contingency Planning	☐	Partnerships, Collaborations	☐	Merger, Closure
☐	Mission, Vision, Strategy	☐	Board Engagement & Leadership	☐	Marketing, Communication
☐	Resource Development	☐	Operations	☐	Technology
☐	If other, please describe:				

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$10,000

Proposal Summary: *(a few sentences, please)*

The Rock School for Dance Education seeks support for its scholarship funds, which benefit young people in Chester and Philadelphia Counties. Each year, The Rock School commits more than 20% of its annual budget—totaling over \$1.4 million—to scholarships and programs that bring dance to young people regardless of their financial situation. Scholarship awards totaling \$195,000 solely benefit students training in Chester County. Funds from the Chester County Community Foundation will assist students studying at the West Chester location with financial need and exceptional talent to reach their potential locally at one of the world’s finest dance academies.

II. GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Provide clear, concise information in 1-3 pages. Please be brief.

1. Nonprofit's overall aims, key initiatives, key achievements & distinctiveness

The Rock School's ballet program includes three branches: the Professional Division, the Ballet Division, and the Pre-Ballet Division. Each serves children in ways appropriate to their age and interests.

The Pre-Ballet Division serves children aged 3-6 with once-weekly classes that provide a foundation in ballet technique in a developmentally appropriate manner, while exploring the joy and excitement of movement, imagination, and music. No audition is required for participation.

Children aged 7-18 who wish to continue their ballet progression or study it avocationally are part of the Ballet Division. Classes are held in West Chester and Philadelphia after school and on Saturdays, focusing on the strong classical foundations needed to develop a healthy dancer. Boys have specialized classes to prepare them for their unique movements, and girls, when physically and technically ready, study pointe work. Children progress at their own pace from entry-level Ballet 1 through Ballet 4X. The Ballet Division is open to all.

The audition-only Professional Division is the pinnacle of The Rock School's ballet program, preparing exceptional students for a professional dance career. All students at this level receive both ballet training and college-prep academics through the school. Many of the students also live in Rock School housing. Professional Division classes are offered six days a week, from morning to evening, requiring an exceptional commitment. The Rock School has a long history of successfully preparing the world's best dancers for professional careers.

The journal Scientific Reports published the results of a 21-year examination of American ballet schools in 2023. The article, entitled "Quantifying hierarchy and prestige in US ballet academies as social predictors of career success" (Herrera-Guzmán, Y., et al. Sci Rep 13, 18594, 2023), named The Rock School for Dance Education as the top-ranked school in the list of the top 5% most prestigious U.S. ballet academies.

The authors analyzed "...data on competition outcomes from 6363 ballet students affiliated with 1603 schools in the United States, who participated in the Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) between 2000 and 2021.... We provide evidence that schools' strategic network position bridging between communities captures social prestige and predicts the placement of students into jobs in ballet companies. This work reveals the importance of institutional prestige on career success in ballet..."

They went on to say, "The ballet industry is renowned for its limited job opportunities and high competitiveness. Our research shows that ballet companies often exhibit selection biases based on the dancer's affiliations.... While our measure of success currently focuses on job placements as company dancers, it is important to recognize that a successful career in ballet can encompass a variety of roles, including teaching, choreography, and administrative duties.... Lastly, we hope that this work raises the attention of how important is school choice for the dancers' future."

This independent, peer-reviewed study confirmed The Rock School's long-held reputation for excellence. Its data suggests that for more than two decades, Rock graduates have had a better chance of professional employment than those in any other ballet academy in the United States. Data from the last two years (below) shows that 98% of Rock School graduates continued to professional dance positions, college, or further dance study. Backed by scientific evidence, The Rock School can confidently say that its graduates have greater potential to earn a living in the dance field than those from any other school in the U.S.

2. Funding request

What specific needs and issues are being addressed?

The Rock School for Dance Education requests a grant of \$10,000 to fund scholarships for students training at the West Chester location with financial need and exceptional potential. A portion of this fund will support six Spanish-speaking children from economically disadvantaged families at Hillsdale Elementary School in West Chester to take after-school dance training.

Since Louis XIV founded the Académie Royale de Danse in 1661, young people have opted to study, and sometimes make a profession of, ballet. The Rock School offers exceptional experiences and a training program designed to nurture dancers who possess the skills to succeed in a dance career. As one of the few academies in the U.S. to offer an individually tailored, accredited academic education integrated into the dance class schedule, Rock students graduate with the country's best ballet training and a well-rounded, college-preparatory education overseen by a certified educator.

Ballet schools affiliated with a professional company are closely tied to that company's artistic style and vision. Students who train in these situations can find their performance abilities limited to that particular style. As an independent school not affiliated with a professional company, The Rock School is led by an artistic team with strong and varied connections across the dance field. Graduates transition into a wide range of classical ballet programs and professional companies. The Rock's curriculum provides a solid classical foundation with versatility as a key feature, enabling students to adapt to almost any style.

Financial resources and geographic location often limit many young people who aspire to a professional dance career. The Rock School allocates over \$1.4 million toward scholarship assistance, ensuring the most promising children can receive the best education regardless of their families' economic means. With safe, supervised housing for up to 60 students, teens from anywhere in the world come to West Chester and Philadelphia to access professional development opportunities.

Why is it important to fund this now?

Scholarship assistance is particularly critical at this time. Federal funding that once supported dance students was discontinued in 2025. Pennsylvania state funding is also in jeopardy. While funding has decreased, the number of students coming to Philadelphia and West Chester has increased in recent years, along with the cost of training these young people. The Rock School must seek a larger, more diverse funding pool if it is to continue supporting young people through scholarship funds.

How will results and impact be demonstrated?

Positive, impactful results can be seen in the trajectories of Rock School graduates, backed by recent research from Northeastern University (see question 1). The depth and breadth of the school's dance training,

combined with a solid academic education and extraordinary performance opportunities, provide students with more career advancement options than most other schools.

The Rock School Professional Division has graduated 46 students in the past two years. Of these, 37% moved directly into employment with ballet companies, including contracts with a company or its second company, as well as trainee positions. Students earned positions with Finnish National Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, and The Washington Ballet, among others. This is an extraordinary number, given that most graduates are either 18 or 19 years old, and this is their first job.

Thirty-three percent of the graduates continued their dance training before embarking on their careers. The Rock School's thorough and eclectic preparation ensures that these students are accepted into the world's finest schools, including the John Cranko Schule of Stuttgart Ballet, the Princess Grace Academy in Monaco, the Jackie Kennedy Onassis School of American Ballet Theatre, and the Boston Ballet School, among others.

Twelve students, or 26% of the graduates, were accepted to colleges including Fordham University, The Juilliard School, Indiana University, and Colgate University, among others. While some of the young people majored in dance, others chose fields of study such as pre-medicine and biochemistry. The college-preparatory education they received at The Rock School enabled them to choose a career path outside the dance field at some of the nation's finest universities.

While The Rock School successfully removes many hurdles that often keep young dancers from a professional career, financial barriers continue to challenge both the school and its students. Exceptional ballet training, a solid academic education, room and board, and the necessary ballet attire (including shoes, costumes, and tights) all combine to create an expensive path to a career in ballet. The Rock School allocates its resources to award over \$1.4 million in annual scholarships; however, this amount is insufficient to assist every young person with notable ability or limited financial resources. More students could experience personal and artistic growth at The Rock School if greater scholarship funds were available.