

NEDAWR (New England Dance, Arts & Wellness Retreat)

A Community-Based Arts Project

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Ideas Into Action

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NEDAWR PROJECT NARRATIVE

The Specifics of NEDAWR

NEDAWR (New England Dance, Arts & Wellness Retreat), pronounced “nay-dar,” is an overnight, arts and wellness-based weekend retreat for adults! NEDAWR is envisioned to be a two day, two night yearly weekend retreat for New England based dancers, artists, and wellness educators ages 18 and up away at a nature retreat center located either in the woods of NH or MA. The retreat will be held on a Friday evening to Sunday afternoon time frame and will take place once each year, either in the mid-summer or early autumn. It is most likely that the retreat would be held at the Barbara C. Harris Conference Center (BHCC) in Greenfield, NH, or at a facility that is very similar. BHCC, or a matching counterpart, was chosen to be the host spot of the project due to the fact that it is already a retreat center that has beautiful lodging, nice amenities, great food services, and plenty of outdoor and indoor recreational space. The idea is that NEDAWR would come in and make the space its own, without having to bring any extra supplies besides its guests’ own personal belongings, instructors, and prep materials for different workshops and activities.

The Backstory Shows Existing Assets Within

The New England dance scene, especially in places like Lowell, Massachusetts, is filled to the brim with incredibly creative, artistic, passionate, and wise souls. Being born and raised in Lowell, MA, I myself have been blessed like many other people to be a part of such a vibrant and quickly growing community of dancers, artists, and wellness educators. With the local Lowell dance community creating connections that span out all over to Boston and many other areas in New England, more and more people keep networking and connecting through dance.

What is truly incredible, is that while many dancers and artists are movement and performance based, so many people that are now a part of our “dance community” are those who are also highly knowledgeable in massage therapy, physical therapy, arts therapy, wellness practices, meditation, yoga, and holistic health for the mind, body and soul. In addition to movement specialists and dancers, the “dance community” is also home to people of multiple talents, including musicians, singers, song writers, visual artists, spoken word poets and much more. This collective of humans that hold such positivity and electricity for dance, the arts, and wellness in places like Lowell has spread and connected to places like Amherst MA, Somerville MA, Cambridge MA, everywhere in and around Boston, Portsmouth NH, and now as far reached as New York City. Everyday more and more people are also becoming connected to our community through dance, especially in places like Lowell and Amherst, where college dance crews at UMass Lowell and UMass Amherst bring so many people from all across the country together in dance, and these awesome humans quickly become beautiful additions to the already growing New England dance community. In his book, *The Creative Community Builder's Handbook*, author Tom Borrup eloquently states the importance of finding assets within your own community. He says, “Every community has unique and powerful assets the most important of which reside in its people their creativity and cultural traditions. The key to building a stronger community is the ability to see and understand the things that make it special along with the ability to motivate people to act. These abilities are the central tools you need to do creative community building, the most valuable skills you need to seek out and nurture” (Borrup, 139). With that in mind, my idea for NEDAWR first bloomed from wanting to gather an incredibly beautiful and special community of dancers, artists, and wellness educators from the Lowell,

Boston, and greater Boston areas together in one safe space to be able to share in each other's creative and knowledgeable lights.

What My Roll Will Be

NEDAWR Head Project Coordinator and Executive Board Director. At least for the first year I would not expect to be paid from this project. I would just expect that there will be enough money to cover all costs and break even. As a community worker, myself and the other community workers involved will know that this is an event overall for the community to enjoy together, so making it not for my own profit and having a dedicated team of volunteer executive board leaders would be what the expectation would be.

Why is NEDAWR Important? The Challenges it is Born From

This project is very important for numerous reasons because its roots stem from a need to overcome the challenges currently being faced in the Cambridge and Boston dance and arts communities. Now more than ever, artists from both areas are especially feeling a push out of their own safe spaces that were once used to bring creativity to the people of their communities and to nurture the arts within them. My idea for this retreat came when I saw that a major challenge for the New England arts community, specifically in and around Boston, is that these spaces for the arts and community that were once cherished were now being pushed to the side and taken away. This all comes at a time where numerous losses have been quickly adding up for the Cambridge arts community specifically, but this affects those in Boston and Lowell, and all around New England.

To gain a little more insight, we can first look at the very recent closure of the Cambridge community arts movement space, Green Street Studios, after its 28 years of service. The official Green Street Studio's website released a statement saying, "Green Street Studios is closing after 28 incredible years of serving the dance and arts community in Cambridge and greater Boston. Green Street Studios is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization that fulfills its mission to empower artists to create, explore, and showcase ideas that enhance the vibrancy of our community through affordable rehearsal space and accessible, innovative programming. Each year, GSS has welcomed over 5000 community members to our Central Square studios and Black Box Theater for performances, classes, rehearsals, artist residencies, and more. Green Street Studios is thriving both artistically and financially. Following a turn-around initiated in 2016, exponential growth has continued under current leadership. Despite this success, GSS cannot sustain a significant rent increase brought by new ownership of the building. Tragically, the increase reflects the prohibitive cost to operate in the Central Square Cultural Arts District and broader Cambridge" (GSS.org, 2019). Dancers, movement artists, and other artists alike are being pushed out of their spaces and are clearly being told that their presence is no longer welcome at places where it always had been. This is extremely disheartening and frustrating to the Boston, greater Boston and New England arts communities to say the least.

In addition to spaces like Green Street being forced to close, the push to push out artists continues, with another example being MIT and other spaces that were once "art and dance friendly" now cutting usage of their once free to use areas.

Here is a photo and description from a concerned Lowell and Boston dancer and artist that was shared online:



Elmer Martinez

October 2 at 6:46 PM · 🌐

Double post. first green street studios is closing now the MIT building where half of the street /ballroom dancers have been practicing for years. 2 Huge Losses for the dance community in Boston from all angles and all genre's </3 - not to mention the crap Ashton Aka-stackz got after his event at "Stiggity East" 😞 the dancers of Boston are getting squeezed out.



The arts community in places like Cambridge are currently coming together to do something and are trying to change what they can. In a recent post for an emergency meeting, this was stated, “Hey Cambridge Arts Folks, We all know that the arts in Cambridge are not a priority for city funding. As many of you have read, EMF closed recently due to redevelopment. Now, Green Street Studios is scheduled to close at the end of October. These are tragic losses to the Cambridge arts community - And this trend is speeding up, not slowing down. This constitutes

an emergency. In response, artists and community members are meeting Monday, October 14, 6PM at Green Street Studios to discuss and organize for meaningful political action to support the arts... Signed, Cambridge Arts Movement 2019” (Facebook, 2019). These are just a couple examples of the current challenges existing in the Boston and greater Boston dance communities.

With all of this in mind, my idea for NEDAWR came with the thought that even a brief weekend retreat once a year out in nature and away from the busy city life and from people who seem to be pushing the arts away would most definitely be beneficial to the overall morale of the dance and arts community in New England. The entire purpose of NEDAWR is to bring our communities closer together and to be able to have a space that is safe and specifically tailor made for the artists, dancers, and educators that are all assets to our rapidly growing arts communities. People attending NEDAWR will be able to share and build connections with each other, even if it is just for a weekend, and it is something that multiple people within our community could look forward to participating in. Another one of the main purposes of NEDAWR stemmed from the challenges of the sheer lack of adult overnight camp activities, as it is my belief that adults deserve to still be able to experience away overnight camps too. In addition, the ever growing need for dance and arts conventions being held over a two day period to have a place for their participants to stay and not have to travel great distances back and forth between days, or try to find make-shift housing for an entire weekend, is another known challenge that helped to create the basis for NEDAWR.

How NEDAWR Relates to Other Current Work

As previously stated, there are not many opportunities for adult overnight camps, so I can

definitely say that this project is unique in what the experience that it has to offer. With that being said, the concepts within NEDAWR in terms of programming and about the type of retreat it will be have definitely been seen before within our dance communities, and are seen quite often for that matter, but just not in an overnight and away in nature setting. There are already currently quite a few different weekend convention experiences for dancers, artists, and wellness educators alike just in Lowell and Boston, let alone within the entire New England dance community. Conventions like “Eat, Sleep, Dance, Repeat,” which focuses specifically on dancing and community building, as well as “The Hip Hop Exchange,” and multiple other dance studio type weekend intensives are all current weekend conventions that typically happen yearly that all consist of the same popup workshop style that NEDAWR would consist of as well. With that being said, since these conventions are already currently going on within our own dance community, I especially feel that NEDAWR would be highly looked forward to by multiple people and that dance educators, wellness educators, and artists of all kinds would gladly want to participate in an overnight version of something that they have already most likely participated in beforehand.

Project Goals

The goals that I have for NEDAWR would be that it first and foremost brings the New England artistic community together. Interpersonal connections will be made and new bonds will be created that would help grow and strengthen the overall infrastructure of the New England arts community during and well after the retreat has ended. Another goal is that this dance and arts community that is especially now feeling more of a push out of their spaces can come to this retreat and know that they have a safe, comfortable, and accommodating space to be free in

participating in and sharing their art. I want that adults can come away to this retreat in nature and surround themselves with positivity, movement, art, and education on wellness and that they can get away from their crazy busy lives that cause stress, even if it is just for a weekend, as that is the whole purpose of this being a retreat and not having it called a convention or a workshop series. I want the adults coming to be able to get away from it all for a weekend in a place that they do not usually go and build connections with those that they are not fully familiar with so that they can leave from the retreat weekend feeling replenished, revitalized, ready to jump back into their lives full of energy, and hopefully with a new spark and passion for why they do what they do every day. Another goal is that the artists, dancers, and educators that come can share in their art and their life experiences. Another goal is that networking is done and new friends and connections are made and those connections are brought back into all the communities in which all retreat participants come from. The main goal overall is for those attending the retreat to have a blast and create friendships and memories that last for a lifetime. The final goal is that the event runs smoothly and is one that participants will spread the word about and will want to invite themselves and all of their friends and families and community partners to every year that it happens.

Target Audience

The target audience for this retreat would be adults ages 18 and up that are either currently a part of the Lowell, Boston, or general New England dance and arts community, or anyone that is also near New England and interested in learning more about what it means to become a part of our growing community. Anyone over the age of 18, regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, religious affiliation, or socio-economic class can gladly come and participate in

the weekend retreat. The age would be 18 and up because this retreat is specifically for adults that do not usually get opportunities to go away for a weekend with their friends and community very often, especially at a dance, arts, and wellness centered retreat up in the woods of NH or MA. The target audience would be reached by multiple platforms of communication, one of the biggest ones being word-of-mouth, since that is currently how quite a lot of the events in the New England dance community are heard about. Social media will be a huge presence in marketing as well, and a Facebook event page will be made along with an Instagram and Snapchat for the retreat. A newsletter can also be made and those interested can sign up for emails in order to get monthly updates on how to register for the event, what the event is about, and they would be able to email back the main email with any questions or concerns that they may have. In terms of inclusivity, this retreat is for any adult over the age of 18 that is a current New England dancer, artist, wellness advocate, or educator, or for people looking to become involved in said communities. It is for all humans and all walks of life as long as they are over the age of 18 and they come because they have either a current involvement or an interest in dance, movement, any of the arts, or just about general wellness of mind body and spirit. The only true requirement would be that they would have to be okay with being at a retreat center in the middle of the woods for the weekend, but as will be explained later on, the retreat center is full of modern amenities and lodging and good food, so it will be friendly for everybody to participate in a controlled and safe environment.

The retreat will be inclusive of all abilities of people also, as it will be advertised as a

heavily movement and workshop based retreat but one that does not necessarily need full on physical activity skills to participate, so those that are in any way movement impaired can definitely still come and enjoy. That of course will have to be decided upon the individual themselves about whether or not they would be able to handle all the physicality of the weekend for their own body type. There will also be sit-down workshops along with meetings and discussions, so even though a lot of the weekend will be somewhat physical and movement based, a person that is not able to move easily could still come and be an active participant if they choose to do so.

Activities at NEDAWR

Activities at this two day, two night retreat will include two full days chock full of different types of workshops, activities, and information sessions. There will be dance and movement workshops led by different artists, dance educators, and choreographers from all over New England. There will be different visual and performance arts-based workshops, as well as potential workshops on singing, song writing, slam poetry, musicianship, painting, drawing, and other things of that nature. There will also be workshops and info/discussion sessions based on holistic wellness, including workshops held by physical therapists or personal trainers on bodily and physical health, guided meditations and yoga sessions by different trained instructors, as well as opportunities to participate in different massage therapy, food awareness, and spirituality workshops also. As this retreat will be held at an outdoor center like BHCC, there will be opportunities for outdoor activities such as water sports and recreation, different challenge courses, ropes courses, or even just outdoor nature walks, yoga, meditation, and things of the likes. Before the event, there can be different planning meetings leading up to the weekend

retreat, and then after all the activities that happened during the retreat, there could potentially be small talkback sessions held with the leaders of the retreat and the participants to see what could be improved on for years to follow and what they enjoyed or did not enjoy about their weekend.

Outputs

Outputs will include the number of individuals that sign up for the NEDAWR. The number of individuals that actually participate in the retreat. The number of workshops held during the retreat weekend, as well as number of instructors that come to teach the various workshops. The number of community collaborators that would like to offer their services in both planning in helping the retreat weekend to follow smoothly. The amount of new and positive word and news spread about the New England dance and artists community during the planning for the event, at the retreat itself and, then within the aftermath of response about that retreat. The goal of NEDAWR is to have at least 90 to 100 participants in its first year. With reaching out to not only the Lowell and Boston dance communities, but also to all of the art communities that are both in and throughout New England, there is a hope that numerous people from all different types of art backgrounds will want to participate. The retreat can not be too large because it is meant to be more of an intimate experience, but having close to 100 people participate and be in the space altogether for the first year of its running seems definitely doable as long as NEDAWR is promoted correctly. Another output would be the number of artist and educators that are either getting a free stay or getting paid to come to the retreat and participate in teaching, as this gives them the platform to have their services and skills be appreciated by an entire community of people.

Outcomes: Short-Term Impact

For short term impact, people participating will be able to enjoy themselves and their time away at the NEDAWR and will be able to return back to their own day-to-day lives with a new sense of motivation. Participants will have fun and be relaxed after this weekend retreat away. For participants that are coming that were not as heavily involved in the arts before, they hopefully will now become much more involved in their community arts wherever they are from. Networking happens naturally and new connections between people are made to be brought back to their communities and strengthened throughout the year. With NEDAWR being successful, more communities and organizations see that giving adults an opportunity to have a weekend retreat away is overall very beneficial for everyone's physical and mental health and wellness. Lastly, a more heightened visibility and understanding of holistic wellness, and physical, mental, and bodily health is sparked in a new community of people after the retreat.

Outcomes: Long-Term Impact

Long term goals would be that city governments and even the state governments see that retreats like NEDAWR are being held not just for fun but also in response to the local crises of artists being pushed out of the already limited artistic and creative spaces in New England. That a new awareness is raised within the New England arts and dance communities about how important physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness is. That participants in the retreat take lessons back with them that will be used and reflected on for a lifetime. Hopefully NEDAWR participants will slowly start to improve their quality of life because of what they learned during the weekend retreat about how to better take care of themselves and their needs,

and to not run themselves ragged during their everyday lives. That word spreads positively and quickly both in person and online about just how cool the experience of the retreat was and hopefully the retreat gets more participants in the years to follow. Lastly, the New England arts community is seen and recognized as being the very special and electric community that it is by other areas in the U.S and beyond.

Evaluation Measures

In terms of evaluation measures, it had been mentioned previously but one way of evaluation could be that at the end of the last retreat day, the retreat organizers sit down in small groups with NEDAWR participants that were there during the weekend and they can have a feedback and talk back circle and take notes right then and there, so the experience is fresh in the minds of those who participated. A poll can be sent out electronically over email in the newsletter or via the sign up for the retreat itself to the participants that were involved also to get more feedback on what went smoothly, what did not, and what could be improved on for the years to follow. Maybe that feedback loop can inspire some positive change in action towards paying more attention to local art spaces and just how important they are to the well-being of an entire city and communities.

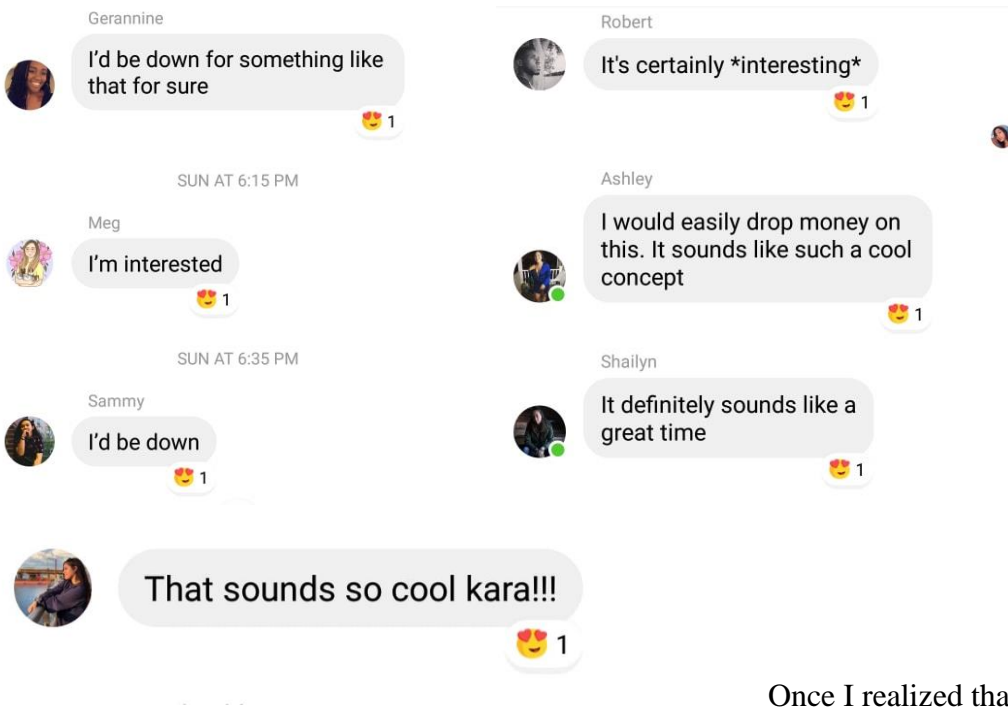
Unanswered Questions

Will all orgs and people we want to collaborate be down to collaborate? Will it be at BHCC? Will they allow us to be there? If not where will we have it? How will ticket sales go? Where is the money to book BHCC or a place like it being funded from? Do we get a grant to pay for booking it all? Do we sell tickets first and then gather all the money and book the place with as many people that sign up? What will we get for instructors, who will want to come and

teach? Do instructors come for free and that is their pay, or do they pay half of their cost to come and participate? If they just want to instruct and leave do we pay them to come and leave? If we want to fundraise for this event, how do we go about doing so?

NEDAWR PROJECT TIMELINE

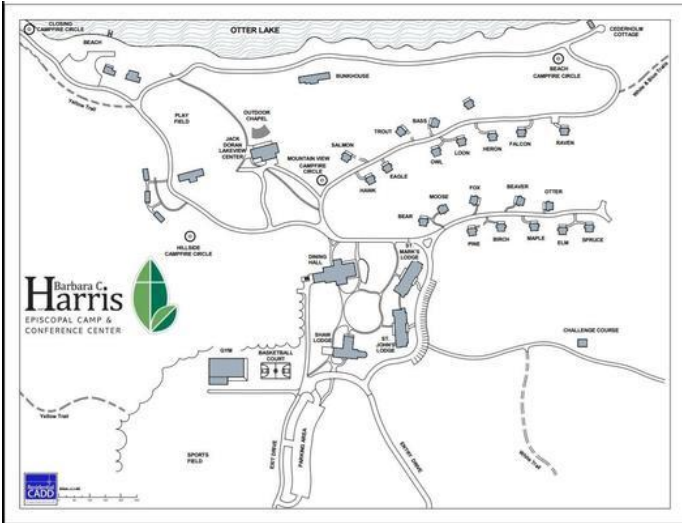
I am looking at a six months to one year prep timeline from start of the thought of NEDAWR to the end result of retreat completion. I first thought of this idea while in class, and then I typed up a brief summation of what you have already read and sent it out to various dance and arts community group chats that I am a part of. The response was wildly positive, and it definitely showed a heavy interest in the idea and a willingness to actively and happily participate. Here are some screenshots of responses from the group chats that my dance friends stated (Screenshots from Kara's personal messages):



Once I realized that this retreat was something that the dance and arts community members would want, I started to look up retreat

centers in MA and NH that would fit the description of what I wanted in an overnight retreat space. I came up on BHCC, looked further into the website, and then found out about specifics like pricing and booking. As stated prior, BHCC for a retreat, or a place similar to it, was chosen because it is already a retreat center that is already fully equipped with everything that NEDAWR participants will need minus their own personal belongings. Included are some pictures of what BHCC looks like:





Pictures from (BHCC.org, 2019).

Links to the budget and planning pdf are linked in the bibliography below, also both from (BHCC.org, 2019). After I found BHCC, I started to look at websites for potential grant project funding and money in MA and came up with these, the “New Festival Grant” from the Mass Cultural Council, and more information on grants and networking with the “Nonprofit Partners Program” from Philanthropy Massachusetts and the links to both websites will be in the bibliography below (MCC.org, 2019) (PhilanthropyMA.org, 2019). Once all of that was set, I would then reach out to different Lowell and Boston and NH community orgs to see if they would like to collaborate. Potential Community partners could be UMass Lowell for Barbara C. Harris Center booking help, as student activities at UML goes there for a leadership retreat every fall, UMass Amherst, and local dance companies like The Expressive Movement, Planet Dance, Mill Advised, Strive For Change Lifestyle, and also the Mass Cultural Council, along with other MA, Boston, and New England arts orgs and nonprofits.

I would share my idea with them and from there once enough people were interested, we could create an Executive Board of heads from all the orgs to meet up and decide on how we would go about planning an event like NEDAWR and the next steps we would need to take. Once the community project EBoard has been created, from there we can look into actually finding a weekend date in late summer or early fall that would work for booking BHCC or any other place we found that was better suited to fit the retreats specs, and then we would go about promo, funding, and ticket sales. We would then start to market and look for instructors for the retreat weekend. The event would need photographers and videographers too (maybe volunteered ones looking for experience or their part of the stay could be paid for and they could also participate. We would need pic and video coverage of the whole weekend retreat. The

EBoard and I would then look at more grant websites together and see what we could come up with. We would start promo asap just to get NEDAWR being talked about around New England. Once the venue and ticket situation was figured out, we could properly promote. We would do promo online, buy ads on Facebook, Instagram. and more, and we could have ourselves or other board volunteers go to local events, hand out flyers, and have people sign their names up on an email list to see who is interested. We would have an EBoard member committed to creating and putting out a bi-weekly newsletter to spread updated event info as it is happening and eventually spread location info, instructor line up, and any and all info on NEDAWR. We would then link the event up to an online registration and ticketing system to keep track of who is going to go to event. We would promote up until the event occurs, and check in on the venue as time gets closer.

After the event occurs, at the end as previously mentioned, the NEDAWR EBoard get feedback from the retreat community, thank the venue, instructors, and participants profusely and properly either by email or card in order to keep the good ties and connection for the following year. Post retreat, we would invite participants to send us all pictures and footage and video that they took of the whole weekend so we could share on maybe an official website that would be created for the event and on the Facebook event page and newsletter. This material would be used as promo material for the following years to come. We would then start automatically looking to book the next NEDAWR weekend retreat day for the following year well in advance.

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