

SPRING 2026



DANCE AS A BUSINESS

A BUSINESS GUIDE FOR PRE-PROFESSIONAL DANCERS

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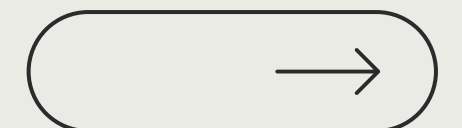


TABLE OF CONTENTS

A breakdown of what this guide covers and how each section helps you begin your career with structure, strategy, and intention for sustainability.

1. WHY THIS EXISTS

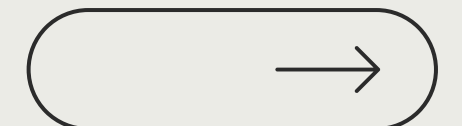
2. THE TWO WAYS DANCERS EARN MONEY

3. WHAT A DIVERSIFIED DANCE CAREER LOOKS LIKE

4. FINANCIAL BASICS FOR DANCERS

5. YOUR LONG TERM CAREER STRATEGY

6. REFLECTION



1.1 WHY THIS EXISTS

SECTION 1: WHY THIS EXISTS

Growing up with a mother who is a dancer, I heard all the fears about pursuing dance professionally: instability, financial uncertainty, and questions about long-term sustainability.

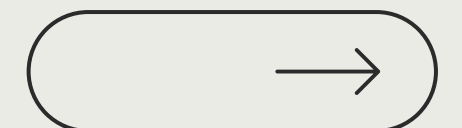
But I always believed there had to be a way to make dance both fulfilling and financially sustainable.

Over time, I realized the gap wasn't often about talent. It was business sense. It was understanding how to navigate shifts in the economy, shifts in demand, and shifts in your body over time.

This guide offers that lens: a structured approach to building a sustainable dance career.

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2.1 THE TWO WAYS
DANCERS MAKE MONEY



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SECTION 2: THE TWO WAYS DANCERS MAKE MONEY

Topics we'll cover:

- Working versus built income
- Examples of working and built income
- The pros and cons of each

THERE ARE TWO PRIMARY WAYS TO EARN MONEY AS A DANCER.

WORKING INCOME

This is the money you earn by working and getting paid for your time or skills.

Includes:

- Performing
- Touring
- Rehearsals
- Teaching hourly classes
- Assisting

Working income is money you get paid for the work you do. If you stop working, income stops.

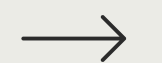
BUILT INCOME

This is the money you can keep making even when you're not actively working.

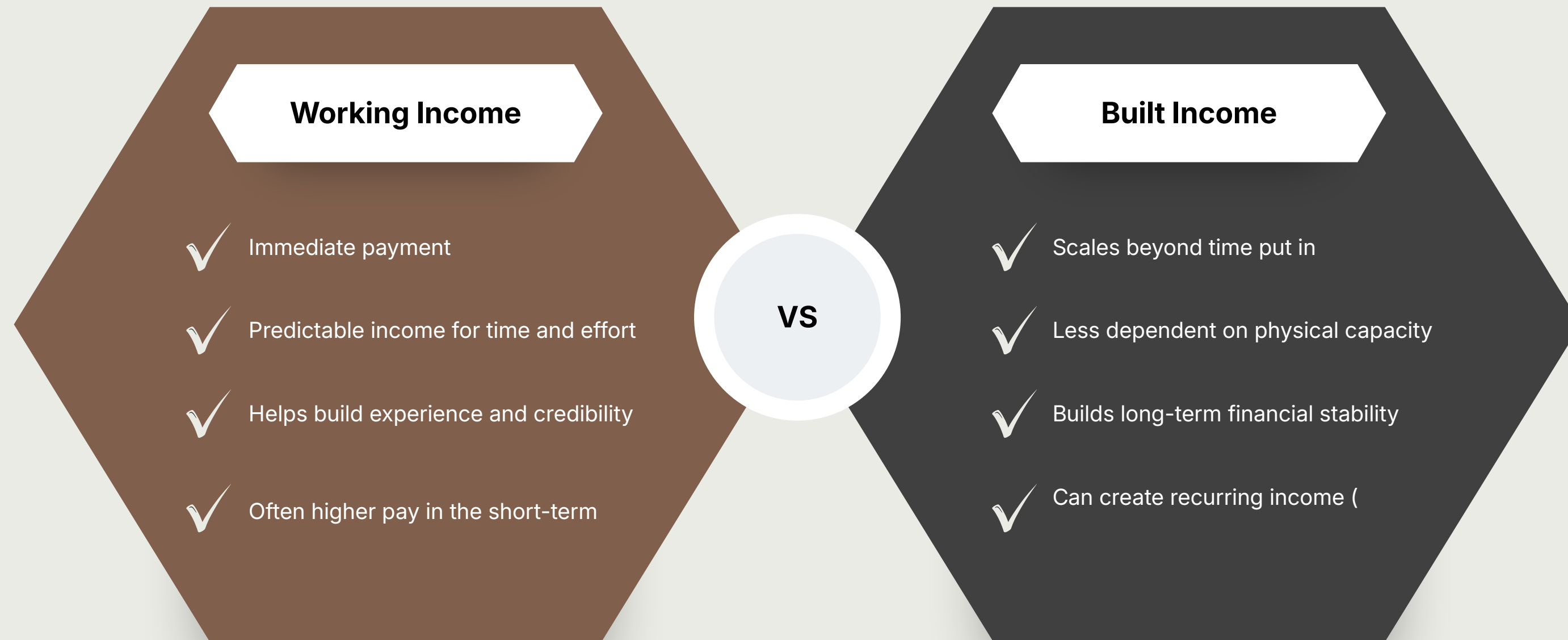
Includes:

- Licensing your choreography
- Getting paid when your work is used again
- Owning your teaching curriculum
- Selling online classes or programs

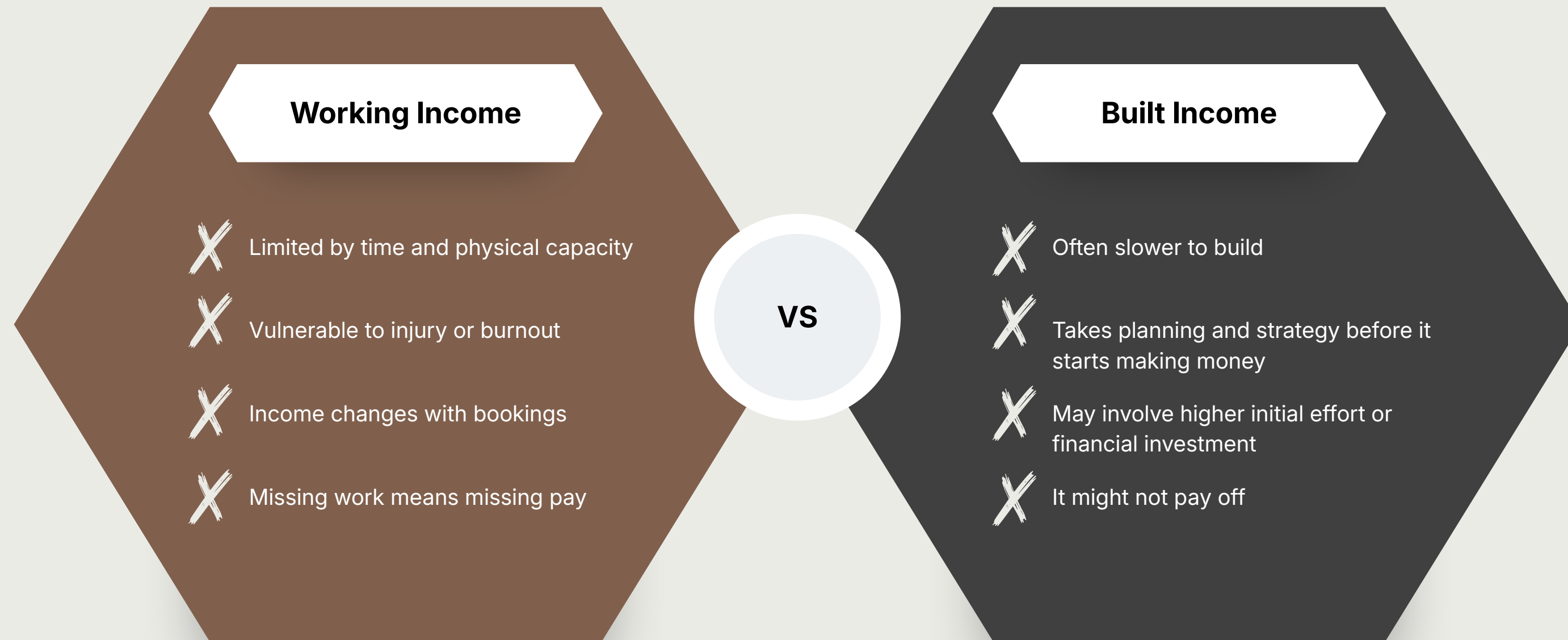
Built income allows your work to continue earning even when you're not physically present.



THERE ARE PROS WITH PRIORITIZING EACH INCOME TYPE...



AND THERE ARE ALSO CONS...



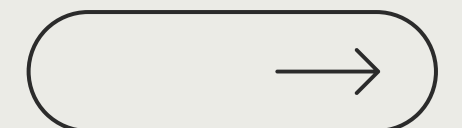
2.5 THE TWO WAYS
DANCERS MAKE MONEY

SECTION 2 WRAP UP

- 1 Working income builds experience. Built income builds stability.
- 2 One income stream is risk. Diversification reduces it.
- 3 Talent earns income. Strategy scales it.

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3.1 WHAT A SUSTAINABLE DANCE CAREER LOOKS LIKE

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SECTION 3: WHAT A DIVERSIFIED DANCE CAREER LOOKS LIKE

Topics we'll cover:

- The risks of depending only on performance work
- How to diversify your income strategically
- The benefits of diversification

SOLELY DEPENDING ON PERFORMANCE WORK IS RISKY TO RELY ON

Diversification means creating multiple income streams so your career is not tied to a single role or booking cycle. Many dancers rely almost entirely on performance work, which can cause burnout and inconsistent income over time. Some of the major risks to consider include:



BOOKING SEASONS CHANGE.

What feels steady one year can slow down the next which causes unpredictability in income.



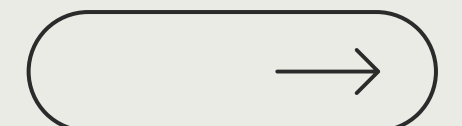
YOUR BODY CHANGES.

Because injuries and aging are part of dance, it's smart to have backup plans in place to stay prepared.



THE ECONOMY CHANGES.

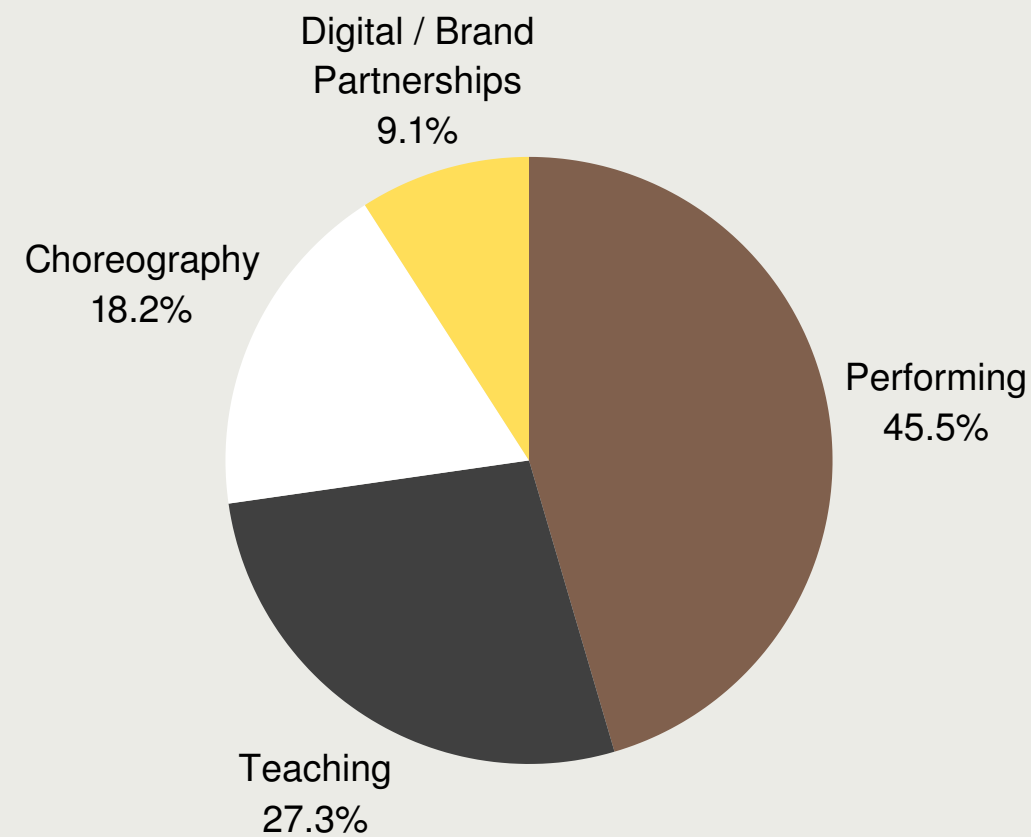
Arts funding, production budgets, and hiring cycles rise and fall so dancers should have a strategy to prepare for these fluctuations.



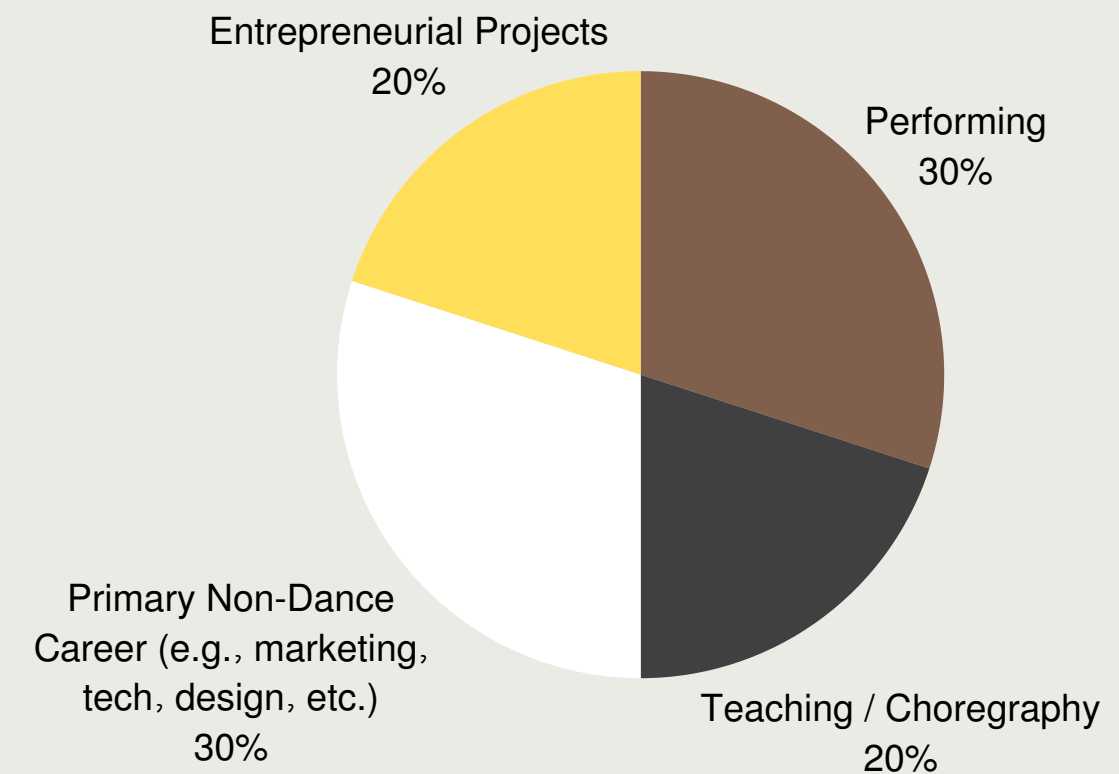
WHEN IT COMES TO DIVERSIFICATION, THERE IS NO ONE “RIGHT” APPROACH

Here are a few examples of what a diversified career portfolio could look like

FULL-TIME DANCE CAREER



PART-TIME DANCE CAREER



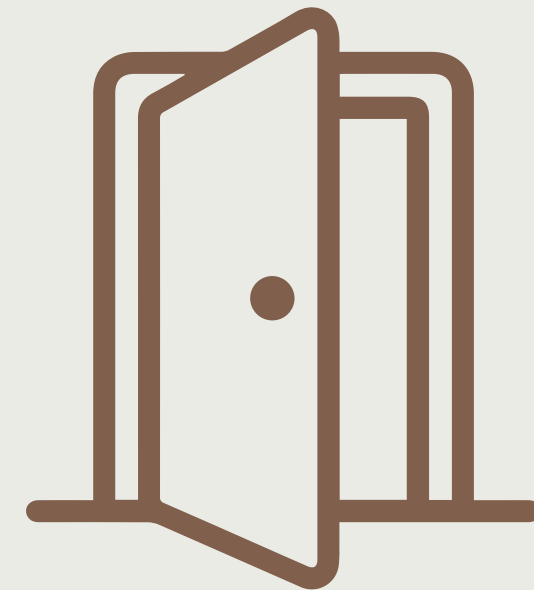
DIVERSIFYING YOUR INCOME GIVES YOU MORE CONTROL OVER YOUR CAREER



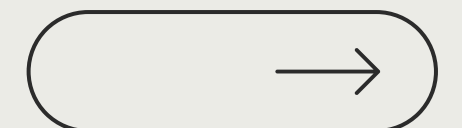
More **control over your schedule** to make time for auditions and contracted work.



Helps **create income during slow seasons** when performances or bookings are low.



Aids in **developing skills that open doors** to new roles in the dance industry.



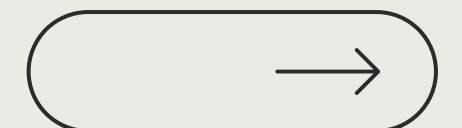
3.5 WHAT A DIVERSIFIED
DANCE CAREER LOOKS LIKE

SECTION 3 WRAP UP

- 1 Relying on one stream of income is risky.
- 2 Diversifying your income can take many forms.
- 3 Having multiple skills makes transitioning out of performing easier.

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4.1 FINANCIAL BASICS FOR DANCERS

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SECTION 4: FINANCIAL BASICS FOR DANCERS

Topics we'll cover:

- Understanding the role of emergency funds, credit, and budgeting
- Financial tips that will help dancers manage their income

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LET'S TALK THROUGH THE BASICS

Because dance careers often involve freelance work and changing income, budgeting, emergency savings, and understanding credit help dancers stay financially stable through both busy and slower seasons.

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BUDGETING

The process of tracking how much money you earn and how much you spend. This helps make sure your basic needs like housing and food are covered.

EMERGENCY FUNDS

Saving money for unexpected situations like injuries, job loss, or emergencies so you have time to plan your next move.

CREDIT

Credit is a record of how responsibly you borrow and pay back money. A strong credit score can make it easier to rent an apartment or get a loan.



UNDERSTANDING HOW TO BALANCE YOUR INCOME IS THE FIRST STEP BEFORE CREATING A BUDGET

There are two main variables when it comes to balancing your budget:

Income



Money you earn from work or other sources.

Examples for dancers:

- Performance or competition pay
- Teaching dance classes
- Choreography fees

Expenses



Money you spend to support your life / career.

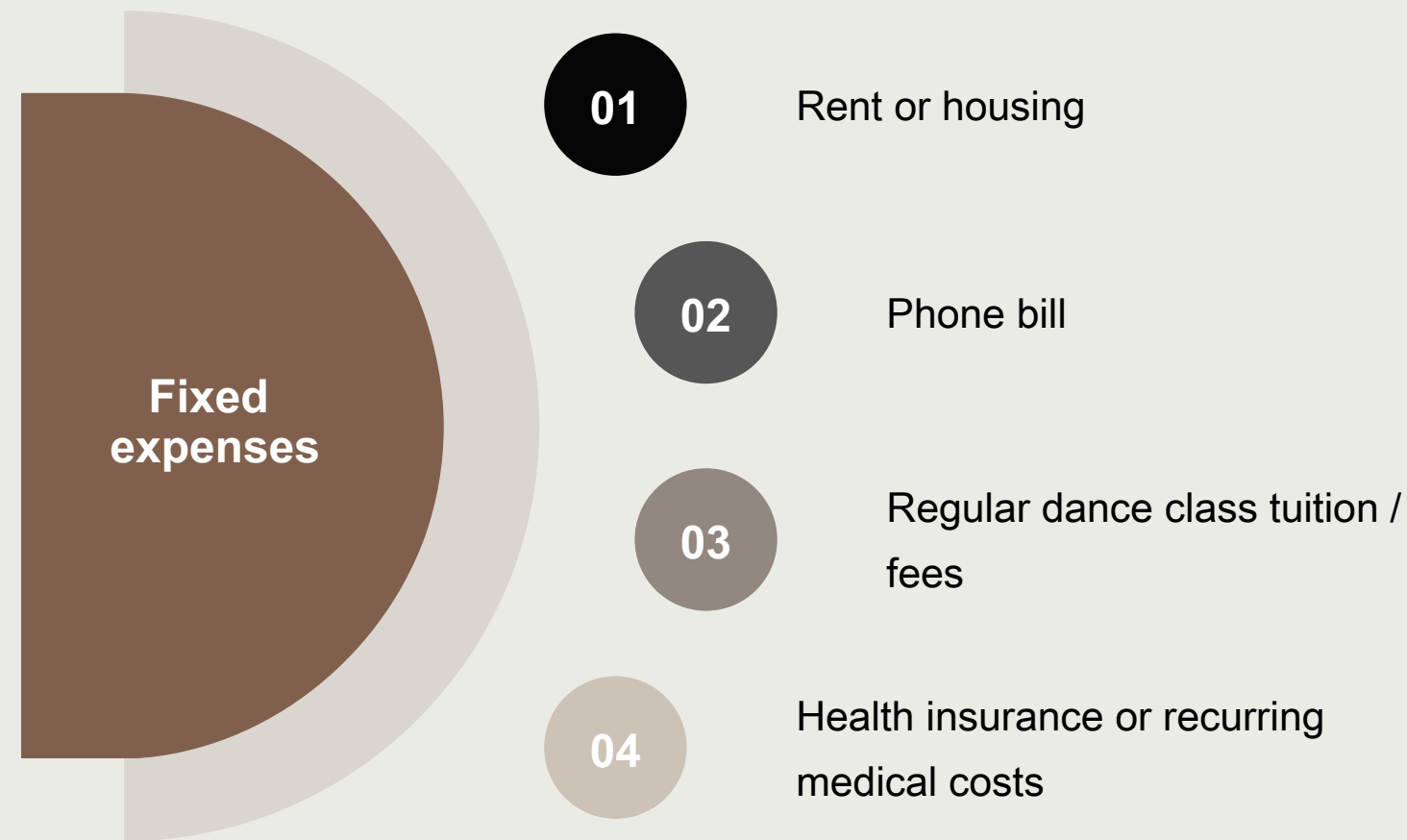
Examples for dancers:

- Dance classes or training
- Costumes, shoes, and dancewear
- Travel for auditions or competitions



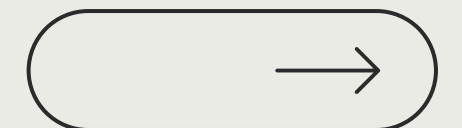
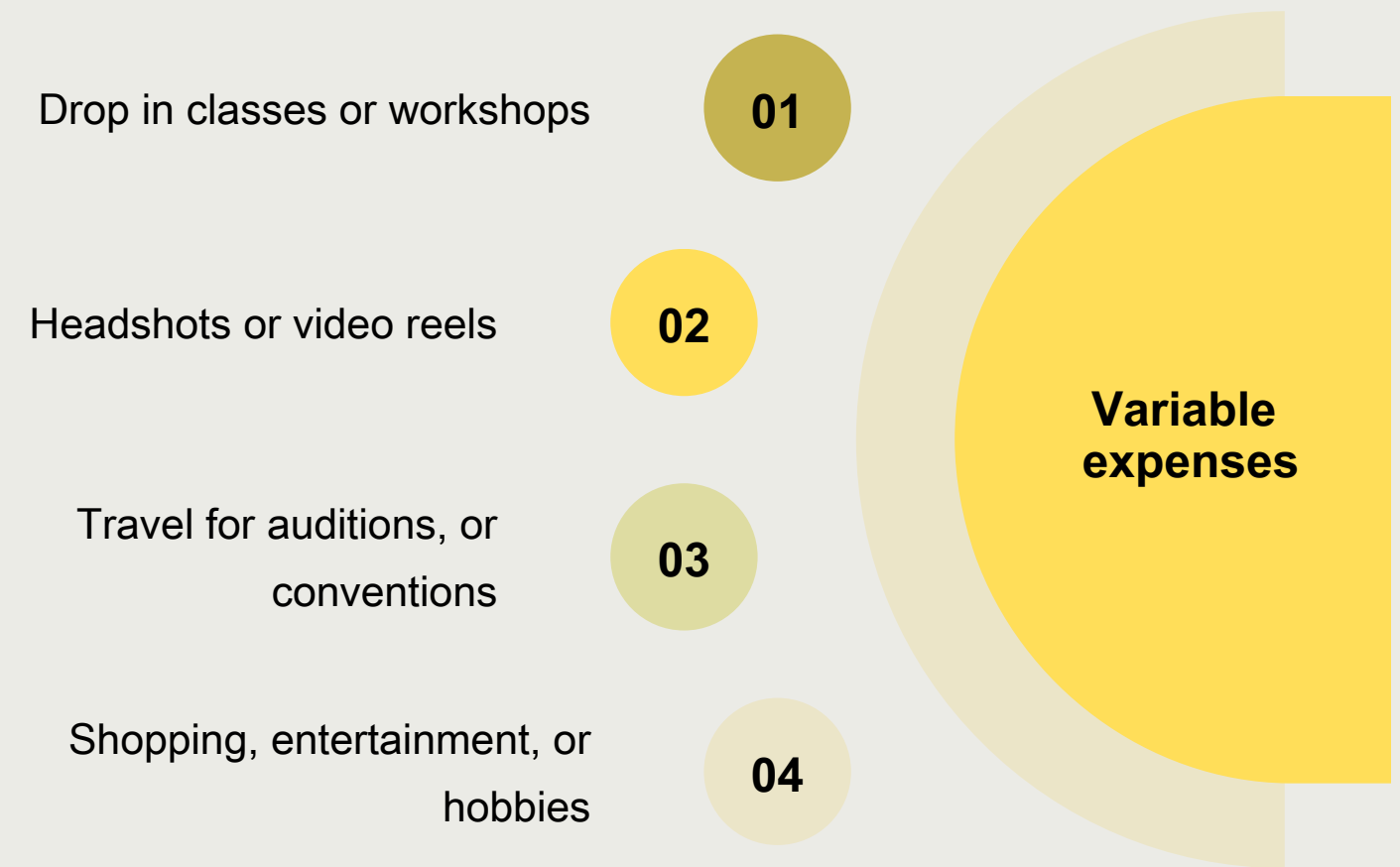
EXPENSES CAN CHANGE MONTH TO MONTH, WHICH MAKES THEM HARDER TO TRACK

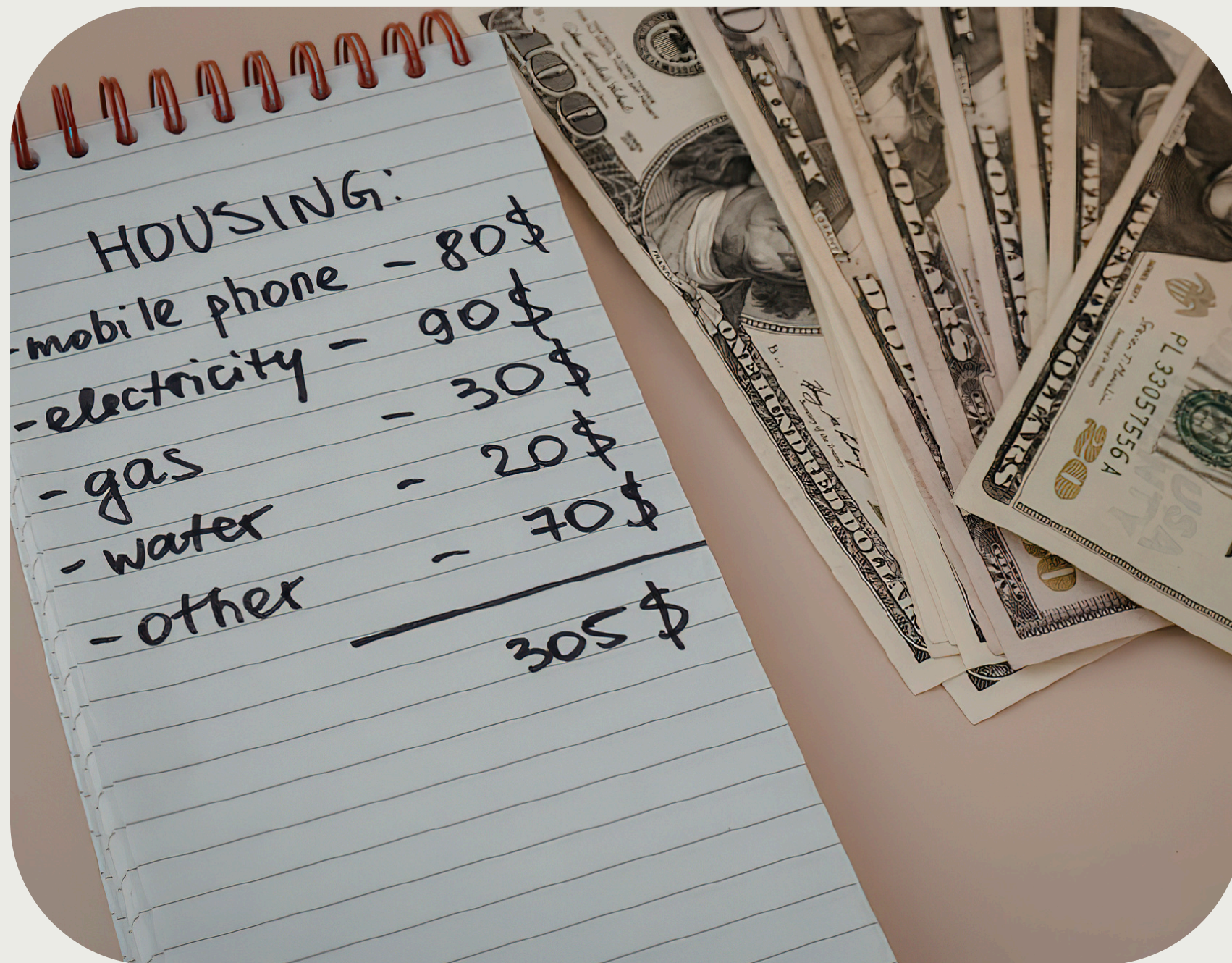
Fixed expenses are costs that stay relatively the same each month and are necessary for basic necessities. Examples include:



VS

Variable expenses are costs that change depending on your activities, opportunities, or time of year. Examples include:

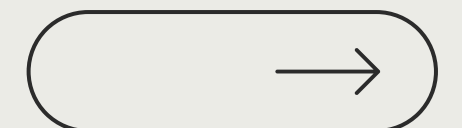




A BALANCED BUDGET HELPS YOU DECIDE WHERE YOUR MONEY SHOULD GO

Start by determining how you want your income to be divided between needs, lifestyle spending, and savings. A common starting point is the 50 / 30 / 20 rule.

- 50% needs (e.g., rent, groceries, phone bill)
- 30% wants (e.g., shopping, travel, restaurants)
- 20% savings + financial goals (e.g., paying off debt, emergency fund)



HOW TO SET YOUR BUDGET



Step 1

Define your financial goals and make them specific / time bound.

Step 2

Choose your ideal income breakdown (e.g., 50/30/20)

Step 3

Track your income and expenses using tools like Excel or budgeting apps such as Rocket Money.

Step 4

Adjust your spending to match your goals

Step 5

Review and update your budget monthly

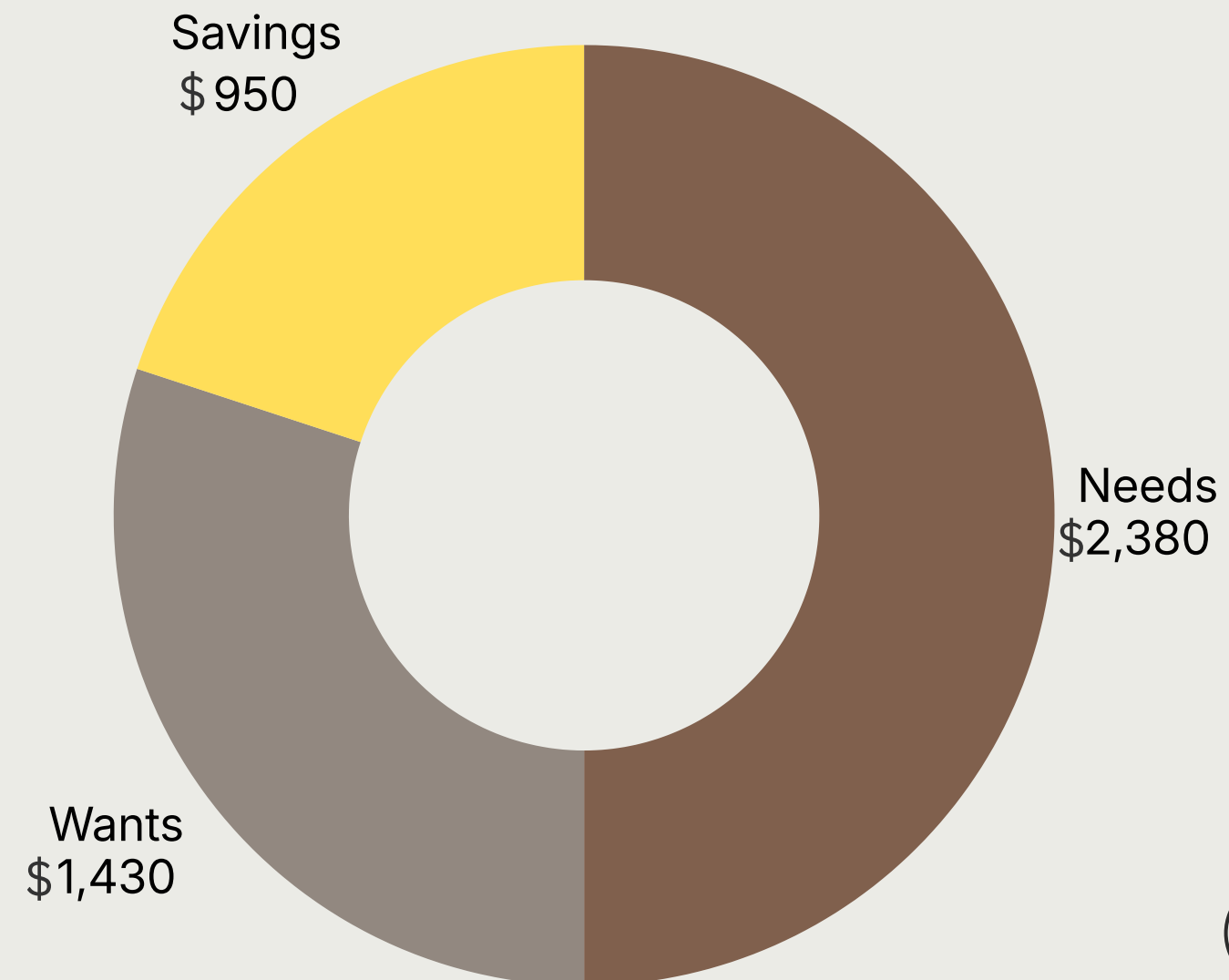


HERE'S WHAT THE 50 / 30 / 20 RULE LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Let's assume you earn **\$80,000 per year**, which comes out to about **\$57,200 after taxes**, or roughly **\$4,760 per month**.

Housing typically should take up about **25–30% of your income**, meaning rent would ideally **fall between \$1,200 and \$1,430 per month**.

● Needs ● Wants ● Savings



EMERGENCY FUNDS SERVE AS A SAFETY NET DURING SLOW SEASONS

This is money set aside to cover unexpected expenses or periods when income slows down. Financial experts typically recommend **saving 3–6 months of living expenses** to provide stability during situations like injuries, job loss, or sudden costs.

Some tips to maintaining your emergency fund include:



KEEP IT SEPARATE FROM YOUR EVERYDAY SPENDING ACCOUNT

Store it in a separate savings account so you're less likely to spend it. Out of sight, out of mind.



START SMALL AND BUILD CONSISTENTLY

Saving money can be difficult. Setting aside a small amount each month can gradually build a safety cushion.



USE IT ONLY FOR TRUE EMERGENCIES

Reserve the fund for unexpected situations like medical expenses, sudden job loss, or urgent repairs.



REPLENISH IT AFTER USING IT

If you need to use some of your emergency savings, make an intentional plan to build it back up over time.





NOW LET'S MOVE INTO CREDIT

Credit gives you **the ability to essentially "borrow" money at an interest rate** and pay it back over time. It can be helpful for planning ahead, especially if you anticipate slower income periods.

However, it's important to fully understand the terms of a credit agreement before opening a new line of credit, since **struggling to repay it on time can negatively impact your credit score.**



YOUR CREDIT SCORE SHOWS LENDERS HOW RELIABLE YOU ARE AT REPAYING MONEY

Your credit score typically **ranges from 300 to 850**.

The **higher your score, the more reliable lenders consider you** when it comes to repaying borrowed money.

Your score is determined by several key factors related to how you use and manage credit.

1

Payment History

Whether you pay back money you borrow on time.

2

Credit Usage

How much of the credit available to you that you're using.

3

Length of Credit History

How long you've been using credit accounts.

4

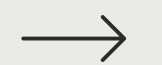
Types of Credit

The different kinds of credit you have, like credit cards or loans.

5

Applying for New Credit

How often you apply for new credit cards or loans.



TYPES OF CREDIT

It's important to understand the different types of credit so you can **choose the option that best fits your financial situation**. Each type comes with **different interest rates and benefits**.

	Credit Cards	Installment Loans	Lines of Credit
Definition	Allows you to borrow money to pay for things now and pay it back later.	This is when you borrow a set amount of money and pay it back in fixed payments over time.	Gives you access to money you can borrow when needed, up to a certain limit.
Examples	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student loans • Car loans • Personal loans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal line of credit • home equity line of credit (HELOC)
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use for everyday purchases • Helps build your credit history • Some cards offer rewards or cash back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payments are predictable • Can help build your credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible – you only borrow what you need • Can help during slow income periods
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest can make things more expensive if you don't pay it off • It can be easy to spend more than you actually have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're committed to paying it back for a long period of time • Missing payments hurts your credit score 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest can add up if you carry a balance • It's still debt that must be repaid

SO WHEN SHOULD YOU USE EACH TYPE OF CREDIT?



CREDIT CARDS



INSTALLMENT
LOANS



LINES OF CREDIT

Best use case

Small everyday purchases

Large planned expenses

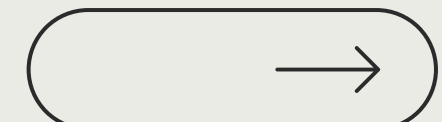
Need flexible access to funds

Examples

- Paying for groceries
- Booking flights or hotels
- Covering small unexpected expenses

- Paying for college (student loans/living expenses)
- Buying a car
- Financing large necessary purchase

- Covering bills during a slow work period
- Paying for a big unexpected expense
- Borrowing money temporarily until your next paycheck



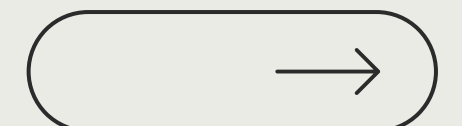
FINAL THOUGHTS

One thing I've learned over time is that building a sustainable career isn't just about how talented you are. It's about the level of intention you bring to it. Part of that intention is learning how to manage your finances so that money stress doesn't start to take away from your love for dance.

A sustainable career is not built on talent alone. It is built on intention.

Stay tuned for upcoming webinars where we will dive deeper into these topics and share more tools to help you navigate the financial side of your career.

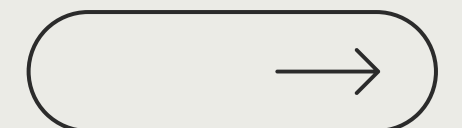
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SECTION 4 WRAP UP

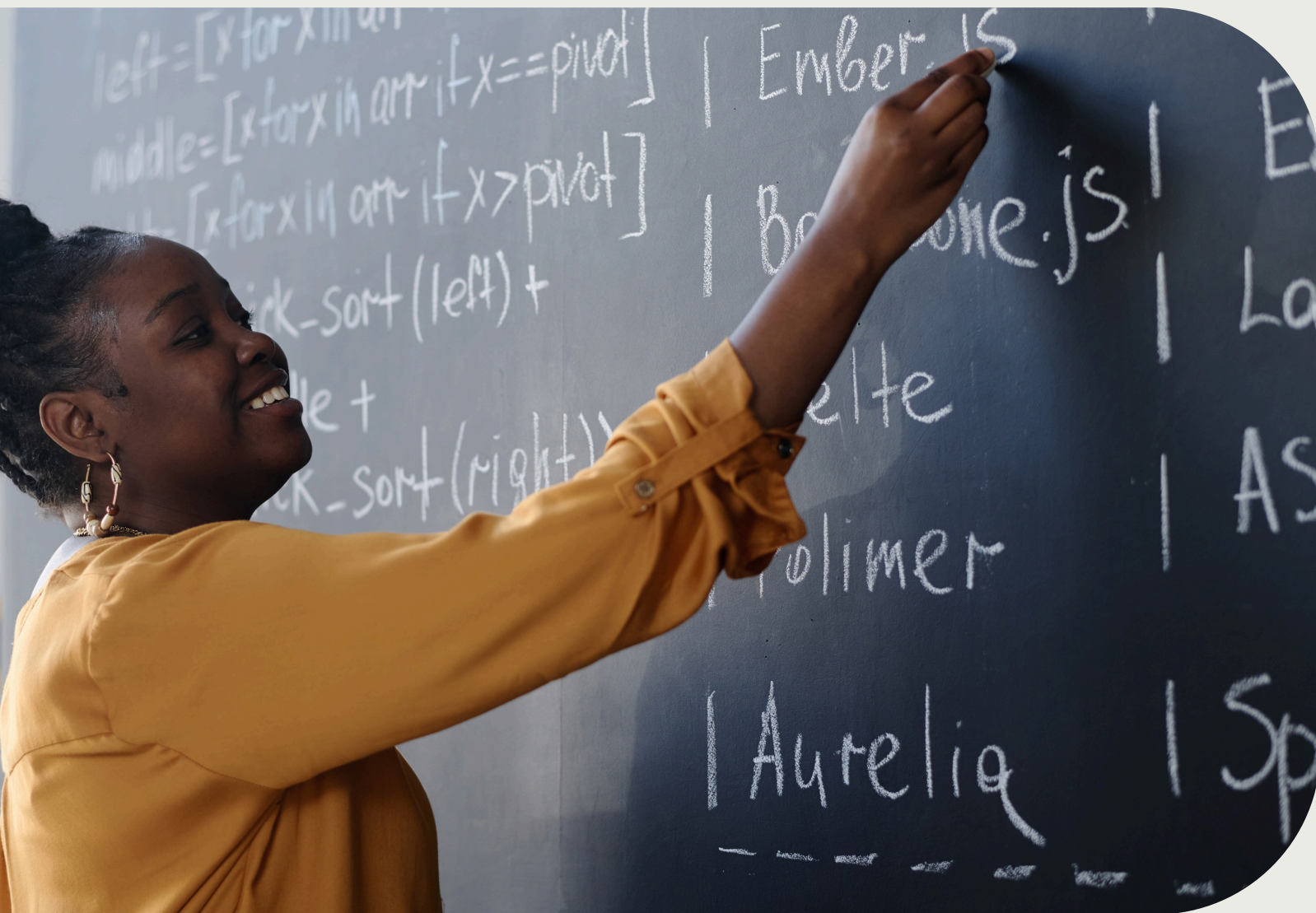
- 1 Tracking your budget helps you plan for unexpected events like job loss, injury, or recessions.
- 2 Credit allows you to borrow money, so it is important to use the right type of credit for each situation.
- 3 Financial awareness gives you more control over your career choices and helps reduce anxiety around money.

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5.1 YOUR LONG TERM CAREER STRATEGY

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SECTION 5: YOUR LONG TERM CAREER STRATEGY

Topics we'll cover:

- Understanding your career goals
- Identifying how to leverage your skillsets and strengths
- Determining long-term career goals and potential career paths

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR INTERESTS AND SKILLSETS HELPS GUIDE YOUR CAREER PATH



Whether you enjoy performing or simply want to work within the arts, having clarity around your interests and skillsets can help you **plan the steps needed to move forward toward your goal.**

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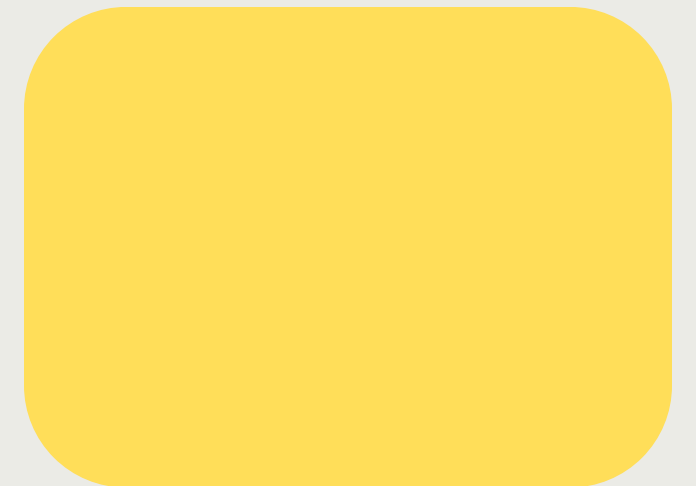
REFLECTION EXERCISE 1: INTERESTS

- Do you want to perform professionally? If so, what path? (e.g., commercial dance, concert dance, Broadway, the NBA, music artists)
- Do you enjoy teaching or mentoring others?
- Do you want to choreograph or create work?
- Do you want dance to be your main career or part of a larger career?
- Do you want to work behind the scenes in dance administration? If so, is there a specific company, competition, or studio you would like to work for? (e.g., Ailey, Radix, Debbie Allen Dance Academy, ABT)

REFLECTION EXERCISE 2: SKILLSETS

Write the skillsets from the list below that best align with you in the box.

- Performance ability
- Teaching and leadership
- Creativity and choreography
- Communication and connection
- Structure and planning
- Discipline and work ethic

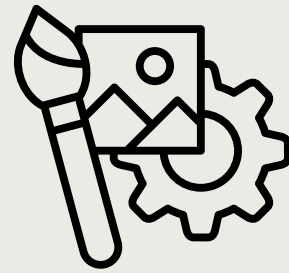


DANCE CAREERS CAN TAKE MANY DIFFERENT FORMS



Performance-based paths

- Company dancer
- Commercial dancer
- Broadway performer



Creative paths

- Choreographer
- Artistic director
- Creative director
- Photographer or videographer



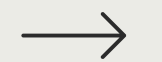
Teaching and mentorship

- Studio instructor
- Competition coach
- Dance educator



Industry and business roles

- Studio owner
- Arts administrator
- Dance content creator
- Producer or event director



LET'S START SETTING GOALS

When setting goals, it's helpful to use **the SMART framework**, which means goals should be **specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound**.

For example, a general goal might be *"I want to buy a house."*

A SMART goal would be: *"I want to buy a house by 2030 and save at least \$75,000 for the down payment."*

Below, you will create three SMART goals for three different stages of your career.

Stage 1 focuses on training, building experience, and entering the industry.

Stage 2 focuses on growing your career and expanding your opportunities.

Stage 3 focuses on long-term sustainability and leadership in the field.



Stage 1: Foundation & Early Career (18–25)

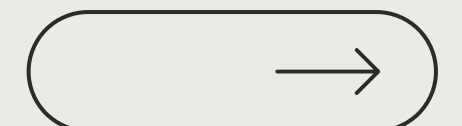
GOAL 1:

Stage 2: Growth & Expansion (25–35)

GOAL 2:

Stage 3: Long-Term Impact & Leadership (35+)

GOAL 3:



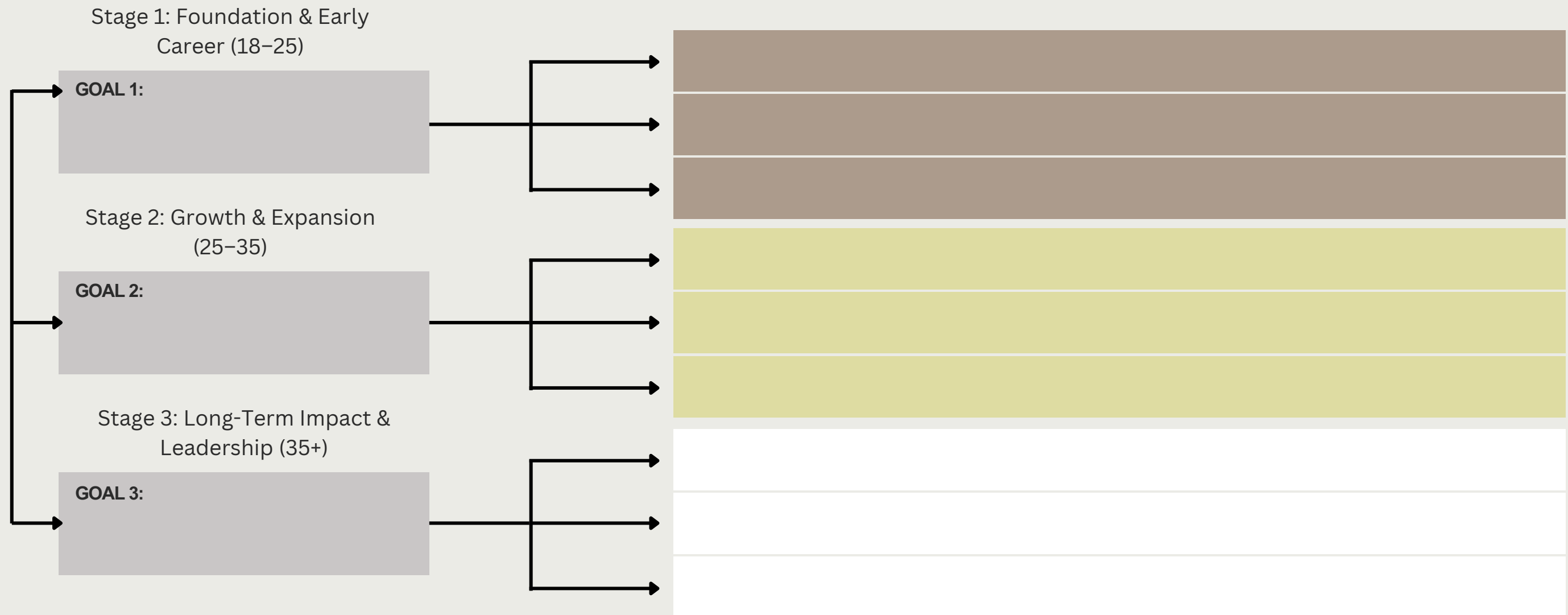
NOW THAT WE'VE SET OUR GOALS, WE NEED TO COME UP WITH A PLAN TO ACTUALIZE IT

It's important to **create checkpoints along the way** to help turn your goals into reality.

Now that you've defined your three goals, what are **three steps you can take for each goal** to help make them happen?



This is you!



SECTION 5 WRAP UP

- 1 Understand your interests and long-term goals to help dictate your career decisions.
- 2 Define and develop your skillsets to create more opportunities as your career progresses.
- 3 Break big goals into smaller steps to help you stay focused and make progress.



6.1 REFLECTION

SECTION 6: REFLECTION

If there's one thing I hope you take away from this guide, it's that being a dancer and thinking intentionally about your career can exist at the same time. Dance is an art form, but it is also part of an industry. The more you understand how that industry works, the more agency you have in shaping your own path.

I hope this guide helped introduce some of the ideas that dancers often do not get exposure to early on, from thinking about income streams to building financial stability and understanding the business side of the arts.

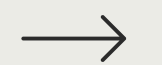
This is just the beginning of the conversation. Throughout the spring, we will be hosting webinars where we will go deeper into many of these topics.

These sessions will include practical tools like Excel templates, guided exercises, and step-by-step frameworks to help dancers stay organized, track their progress, and make thoughtful decisions about their careers. My goal with this work is simple: to give dancers the information, structure, and confidence to move through their careers with intention.

Thank you for taking the time to learn, reflect, and invest in your future.

— Maya Williams
Founder, Dimensional Dance Collective

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THANK YOU

SO MUCH!

PRESENTATION BY MAYA WILLIAMS

