Safe & Sustainable Dance Practice
Empowering Wood Buffalo Artists as Environmental Changemakers

Arts Council Wood Buffalo (ACWB) & SCALE-LeSAUT 2026

1. Why Dance Requires Its Own Sustainability Lens

Dance differs from theatre and other performing arts.

It is:

- Studio-based year-round
- Youth-dense
- Competition-driven
- Body-centred
- Highly mobile

In northern regions like Fort McMurray, dance is often the most accessible and widely practiced artform. Hundreds of young people may train weekly across multiple studios.

This creates a distinct environmental footprint driven primarily by:

- Daily studio heating
- Parent commuting
- Competition travel
- Costume production
- Laundry and water use
- Athletic wear turnover

Dance sustainability is not about sets or scenery.

It is about energy, mobility, material cycles, and bodies.

2. Studio Energy & Winter Heating

In northern climates, heating is the dominant energy use.

Dance studios often operate:

- 5–7 days per week

- Late into evenings
- In large open mirrored spaces
- With high ceilings

Reduce Heating & Energy Load

- Install programmable thermostats
- Zone heating (heat only active studios)
- Convert to LED lighting
- Turn off unused rooms
- Improve insulation around windows and doors
- Close blinds overnight in winter

Even small efficiency gains matter over long seasons.

Resource
• Natural Resources Canada – Energy Efficiency for Small Business

3. Air Quality & Wildfire Smoke

Dance is high-breath, high-output activity.

Northern regions face increasing wildfire smoke events.

Studios should:

- Monitor Air Quality Index (AQI)
- Use HEPA filtration where possible
- Avoid intense cardio during high AQI days
- Adjust rehearsal loads during smoke events
- Seal windows during wildfire periods

Protecting lungs protects longevity.

Further reading
• Alberta Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) – About
• Alberta AQHI Live Map
• Health Canada – Wildfire Smoke and Your Health

4. Parent Commuting & Weekly Mobility

In many communities, parent driving patterns generate significant emissions.

Consider:

- Multiple weekly drop-offs
- Sibling separate classes
- Competition rehearsals
- Weekend intensives

Reduce Commuting Impact

- Coordinate sibling schedules
- Offer back-to-back classes
- Create studio carpool boards
- Cluster rehearsals
- Offer occasional hybrid theory sessions online

Small coordination shifts can reduce hundreds of kilometres weekly across families.

Mobility planning is climate planning.

5. Competition Travel & Slow Touring

Competition circuits often involve:

- Multiple out-of-region events
- Air travel for short distances
- Rapid costume turnover
- High production intensity

This is the largest emissions driver in youth dance.

Slow Touring for Dance

Slow touring in dance means restructuring the competition model.

Principles

1. Regional Clustering
Choose fewer competitions, closer to home.

2. Fewer, Longer Events
Prioritize one meaningful event over multiple short trips.

3. Ground Travel First
Choose bus over flight where viable.

4. Combine Engagements
Add workshops or exchanges during competition trips.

5. Rotate Attendance
Not every dancer must travel to every event.

6. Prioritize Local Showcases
Strengthen community-based performance circuits.

Slow touring reduces:

- Air travel
- Burnout
- Costume duplication
- Financial strain

It strengthens:

- Community relationships
- Artistic depth
- Dancer wellbeing

Mobility should be intentional, not automatic.

Further reading
• Gallery Climate Coalition – Travel Guidance

6. Costumes & Textile Cycles

Dance costumes often involve:

- Synthetic fabrics
- Fast-fashion construction
- Single-season use
- High laundering frequency
- Microplastic shedding

Lower-Impact Costume Practices

- Reuse costumes across seasons
- Create studio costume libraries
- Avoid one-time-use specialty fabrics
- Choose durable construction
- Repair instead of replace
- Share between age groups

Microplastics from synthetic fabrics enter waterways during washing.

Wash costumes:

- In cold water
- In full loads
- Using microfibre filters where possible
- Air dry when feasible

Costume longevity reduces both emissions and cost.

Further reading
• Ellen MacArthur Foundation – Circular Economy for Fashion
• GUPPYFRIEND – Washing Machine Microplastic Filter

7. Athletic Wear & Consumption Culture

High-performance dance culture can drive:

- Frequent leotard replacement
- Rapid shoe turnover
- Trend-based apparel cycles

Studios can:

- Normalize second-hand exchanges
- Host annual dancewear swaps
- Encourage repair of shoes and garments
- Avoid fast-trend merchandise

Sustainability includes resisting unnecessary consumption cycles.

8. Flooring & Studio Materials

Dance floors may include:

- Vinyl (Marley)
- Foam underlays
- Synthetic sprung systems

Consider:

- Longevity of floor systems
- Repair before replacement
- Proper maintenance to extend lifespan
- Avoid unnecessary renovation cycles

Studio infrastructure should be maintained, not repeatedly replaced.

9. Laundry & Water Use

Dance produces high laundry frequency due to sweat and hygiene needs.

Strategies:

- Full-load washing
- Cold water cycles

- Air drying when possible
- Avoid over-washing rehearsal wear
- Use non-toxic detergents

Water and energy use compound over time.

Further reading
• GUPPYFRIEND – Washing Bag & Microfibre Filtration

10. Food, Competitions & Events

Dance events generate:

- Disposable water bottles
- Fast food consumption
- Single-use plastics
- Food waste

Studios can:

- Encourage refillable bottles
- Provide water refill stations
- Promote reusable containers
- Coordinate catering thoughtfully

Event culture shapes environmental behaviour.

11. Injury Prevention & Longevity

Dance is physically demanding.

Burnout and injury lead to:

- High turnover
- Short training lifespans
- Unsustainable performance cycles

Sustainable dance practice includes:

- Rest periods
- Cross-training

- Injury prevention education
- Avoiding over-scheduling
- Mental health awareness

The body is the instrument. Protecting it is sustainability.

Further reading
• Healthy Dancer Canada – The Dance Health Alliance of Canada
• Preventing Dance Injuries: Current Perspectives (PMC)

12. Community & Local Exchange

Dance in northern regions can build local cultural resilience.

Instead of relying solely on external competitions:

- Host regional exchanges
- Invite guest teachers locally
- Share studio spaces
- Co-produce community showcases

Local networks reduce travel dependency.

13. Indigenous Land & Cultural Awareness

Dance practice takes place on Indigenous land.

Responsible practice includes:

- Respecting local protocols
- Avoiding cultural appropriation
- Seeking collaboration, not extraction
- Recognizing land and community in performance

Environmental sustainability must include relational accountability.

14. Studio Policy & Leadership

Studio owners can:

- Develop internal sustainability guidelines
- Track travel distances annually
- Establish costume reuse policies
- Offer sustainability education to families
- Communicate clearly about mobility choices

Policy shifts culture.

Further reading
• Natural Resources Canada – Energy Efficiency for Small Business
• Gallery Climate Coalition – Resources & Guidelines

Closing

Safe and sustainable dance practice in northern and remote regions is not about eliminating competition or ambition.

It is about:

- Reducing unnecessary travel
- Designing mobility intentionally
- Extending costume lifecycles
- Improving studio energy efficiency
- Protecting air quality
- Supporting dancer wellbeing
- Strengthening local cultural networks

Dance is embodied.

Sustainability must be embodied too.