

# **GETTING YOUR BEARINGS**

## **An Introduction to NASD**

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF DANCE**

**June 2023**

**National Office**  
**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF DANCE**

11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21  
Reston, Virginia 20190-5248

Telephone: 703-437-0700  
Fax: 703-437-6312

E-mail: [info@arts-accredit.org](mailto:info@arts-accredit.org)  
or use [staff directory](#)

Website: <http://nasd.arts-accredit.org>

# GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

## An Introduction to NASD

### WELCOME

NASD welcomes you, your expertise, and your interests to its work of supporting dance study and the people engaged in it. NASD was founded in 1981. Since then, it has developed into an extensive effort involving approximately 84 institutions. By way of introduction, this document provides information about three topics: NASD's objectives, its organizational structure, and its basic services.

### OBJECTIVES

The Association is established to develop a closer relationship among schools and programs of dance for the purpose of examining and improving practices and professional standards in dance education and training. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To establish a national forum to stimulate the understanding and acceptance of the educational disciplines inherent in the creative arts in higher education in the United States.
2. To establish threshold standards centered on the knowledge and skills necessary to develop academic and professional competence at various program levels.
3. To foster the development of instruction of the highest quality while simultaneously encouraging varied and experimental approaches to the teaching of dance.
4. To evaluate, through the processes of voluntary accreditation, schools of dance and programs of dance instruction in terms of their quality and the results they achieve, as judged by experienced examiners.
5. To assure students and parents/guardians that accredited dance programs provide competent teachers, adequate plant and equipment, and sound curricula and are capable of attaining their stated objectives.
6. To counsel and assist institutions in developing their programs and to encourage self-evaluation and continuing studies toward improvement.
7. To invite and encourage the cooperation of professional dance groups and individuals of reputation in the field of dance in the formulation of appropriate curricula and standards.
8. To maintain a national voice to be heard in matters pertaining to dance, particularly as they would affect member institutions and their stated objectives.

NASD builds its day-to-day work around four basic program areas that support its mission.

At the core of NASD's activities is **accreditation**. Currently, NASD accredits approximately 84 institutions in 29 states.

NASD accredits an institution when it demonstrates compliance with standards and guidelines related to the quality of the programs of study it offers, when its activities match published descriptions, and when it follows its own stated procedures.

NASD's accreditation procedures involve orientation and training sessions, institutional self-study, on-site evaluation, and review by the Commission on Accreditation.

Regarding the **professional development** of dance executives, NASD has a triple focus. NASD assists executives to address key education and training issues in the development of dance professionals; the broader philosophical issues surrounding dance and dance study; and the daily management issues faced by executives working in schools of dance.

NASD's third major program area is **institutional research**. NASD compiles data, interprets it, then publishes and disseminates it to member and non-member institutions and the public. Dissemination happens in three ways: through (1) the NASD Annual Meeting; (2) NASD publications and projects, and (3) the annual reports of member institutions, and NASD's participation in the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) system.

In the area of **policy**, NASD works primarily in an analytical mode. Dance study in free-standing schools of dance, colleges, and universities is connected to a web of broader questions—free expression in a democracy, education funding, academic politics, arts policy, and many others. NASD helps its members to navigate these issues by making the link between analysis and local action. NASD policy reports often work their way into legislative testimony, reports of governmental task forces, the priorities of philanthropic boards, and the ongoing work of other arts and educational organizations. The primary purpose, however, is to help members think through issues deeply on the way to institutional decisions.

## ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS

To understand how NASD accomplishes its mission and gets its work done, it is helpful to understand the organization's operational functions.

There are five basic functions. The first two are legislative; the next two, judicial; and the last, administrative.

All **policies and programs** of NASD, as well as the standards and guidelines for accreditation, are the work of the membership and the Board of Directors. Members of the Board are elected by the membership. Two public members appointed by the President, along with the Executive Director, *ex officio* and non-voting, complete the roster of the Board.

**Nominations and elections** are the responsibility of the Committee on Nominations, which consults with the membership as a whole and prepares a slate of officers for each Annual Meeting. The Committee on Nominations is chaired by the Immediate Past President of NASD. The other four members of the Committee are elected by the membership as a whole, each for a three-year term.

The **accreditation of institutions** is the responsibility of the Commission on Accreditation. All Commission members, including the Chair, are elected by the membership as a whole. The Commission also has a voting public member, who is appointed by the President of NASD with the advice of the Board of Directors.

**Ethics reviews** are the responsibility of the Committee on Ethics, which considers any case properly brought before it under NASD's review procedures. The Chair of the Committee on Ethics is elected by the membership, and its two members are appointed by the Board.

The President has an **oversight** role, ensuring that the work of NASD follows the published policies, procedures, and protocols. The President also makes **appointments** and consults regularly with the Executive Director.

The **day-to-day business** of the Association is conducted from the National Office in Reston, Virginia, by the Executive Director, who is selected by the Board of Directors. The Executive Director hires all other full-time staff members.

The National Office staff carries out a broad range of functions including administrative management of the accreditation process, financial management of the organization, meeting planning, and record-keeping. The staff also carries out projects, and maintains extensive telephone, electronic, and written correspondence with members, the public, and other agencies.

## MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

NASD is guided by a set of basic and well-tested management principles.

The first is **autonomy**, which means that NASD is legally and organizationally independent.

At the same time, however, NASD strives to maintain **collegial and collaborative relationships** with other bodies and associations in the arts, education, and accreditation.

NASD's management philosophy is the same one that holds the United States together: the idea of **separation of powers within a democracy**. That means making a clear distinction between policy and operations so as to avoid conflicts of interest.

To put it in the simplest terms:

- The legislative and policy functions are the responsibility of NASD accredited institutional members and the Board they elect to represent them.
- The administrative functions are primarily the responsibility of staff. In the accrediting arena, the work of NASD evaluators is facilitated and managed according to Association protocols by the National Office staff.
- The judicial function is carried out by Commission on Accreditation and the Committee on Ethics.

In summary, those making accreditation decisions base their judgments on policies and standards decided by the membership; the staff carries out the policies of the Association, but does not evaluate institutions or programs.

NASD also focuses on its **service orientation** as an organization that meets the needs of its members. Typical of NASD's services are its publications programs and consultation with institutions preparing for accreditation visits.

Always, however, NASD's programs and organizational efforts are focused through the lens of its mission, which places **advancing the cause of dance** at the top of the agenda. NASD strives to temper its efforts with a sense of humor that says: "We take our work more seriously than we take ourselves."

## NATIONAL OFFICE

For most with inquiries, the first points of contact and chief sources of information are the [NASD website](#) and the National Office staff.

The NASD National Office is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays, closed on major holidays and during the period between Christmas and the New Year.

The staff also manages the affairs of several other national arts and education organizations with missions similar to NASD's:

- The [National Association of Schools of Art and Design](#) (NASAD),
- The [National Association of Schools of Music](#) (NASM), and
- The [National Association of Schools of Theatre](#) (NAST), as well as
- The [Council of Arts Accrediting Associations](#) (CAAA),
- The [Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools](#) (ACCPAS), and
- The [Higher Education Arts Data Services](#) (HEADS) system.

Each staff member serves the same function for each organization.

## FINANCES

NASD operates on a balanced budget. In order to remain independent and to avoid competing with member institutions, NASD does not normally seek outside funding for its activities; it simply lives within its means.

## ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Although successful completion of the accreditation process is necessary for gaining membership in NASD, the Association has always viewed the process as **more of a helpful process than as a test**.

Accreditation is a useful way for institutions to:

- Plan for the future;
- Judge themselves against national standards and their own aspirations;
- Take stock of their achievements and needs;
- Gain evaluative assistance from peer experts.

Since a thorough review of the accreditation process is presented during the Self-Study workshop at each Annual Meeting, only the highlights are provided here.

Every newly accredited institution must review its program on a five-year cycle. All others are reviewed every ten years. These reviews always include a full self-study, an on-site evaluation by a team of at least two evaluators, and a review by the Commission. The institutional self-study is the centerpiece of the accreditation process. If new programmatic offerings are adopted between reviews, an institution must submit the offerings for review and approval prior to implementation. Circumstances may determine that an on-site visit is necessary.

NASD encourages those seeking and renewing accreditation to make extensive use of three fundamental resources available on the [NASD website](#):

- The [Handbook](#) contains the accreditation Standards and the Rules of Practice and Procedure;
- The [Membership Procedures](#) contain the procedures institutions must follow, the Self-Study formats, and the procedures for on-site visits; and
- The [Policies and Procedures for Reviews of New Curricula](#) are to be used when adding, changing, and/or modifying curricula.

These resources are only the beginning. There are additional ways to find out about how the accreditation process works:

- Sessions providing a thorough overview of procedures and self-study are held during each Annual Meeting.
- You can visit the Association's website at <http://nasd.arts-accredit.org>, or [contact the National Office staff](#) by phone at 703-437-0700 or by e-mail at [info@arts-accredit.org](mailto:info@arts-accredit.org).
- You can obtain a list of names of individuals who might serve as an on-site [consultant](#). Of course, you don't have to be seeking accreditation to host a consultant. Consultants will be glad to assist you in solving specific institutional problems. Although NASD can provide a list of consultants, NASD does not guarantee that hosting a consultant will ensure Commission approval. Consultants are not hired by NASD, but by institutions.

## HEADS ANNUAL REPORT

Every NASD member must file a [HEADS](#) Data Survey (Annual Report) every year. This information is submitted online and compiled by the staff. Compiled data in the form of *Data Summaries* are sent annually to NASD members participating in the Survey to assist in their decision-making. A special feature of the HEADS system enables institutions to compare themselves against ten or more other institutions of similar size and type.

Because HEADS Annual Reports provide a composite, quantitative picture of each institution, the reports from each of the past three years are required as an appendix to the Self-Study in the renewal of membership process. Specific sections of all institutional HEADS reports remain confidential. Only National Office staff have access to them.

Informational sessions regarding HEADS are held during the Annual Meeting.

## ACCREDITATION AUDIT

In order to keep an accurate public record of each institution's descriptive information, NASD requests that every member institution update its accreditation audit every year. This information, as well as programmatic offerings, is published in a membership listing. The searchable online Directory of [Accredited Institutional Members](#) serves as an updated mailing list and provides current information about degree programs at each institution.

## PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM

Like many associations, NASD serves its members' needs through a variety of publications, primarily accessed from the NASD [website](#). You already know about the *Handbook* and the online *Directory*. In addition to these, NASD publishes:

- [Notices](#), including official announcements concerning proposed *Handbook* revisions and Commission actions; Annual Meeting information; and other items of interest.
- *Executive Advisories* on breaking issues are sent out as needed, while *Briefing Papers* bring members up-to-date on issues, trends, and new policy initiatives.
- *A Sourcebook for Futures Planning* and its *Supplements* provide an extensive menu of techniques, approaches, and analyses for looking at a broad range of concerns.

The Association also publishes reports of special projects and studies in which NASD is involved. Examples include a set of advisory papers for dancers regarding career and/or educational transitions; a Policy Brief on Creation, Performance, and Research; a joint statement on the Master of Fine Arts Degree and Faculty Policies with the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) and the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST); special focus reports on Minority Access to Arts Education; Advising, Counseling, and Mentoring the Arts Student; *Sourcebook Supplement IV: Creating Your Self-Study*; Giftedness, Arts Study, and Work; Tough Questions and Straight Answers About Arts Accreditation; Distance Education and the Arts Disciplines; and Children and Youth, the Arts, and Public Policy: Present Urgencies for Higher Education. The comments and participation of members is actively solicited for the publications program. Ideas are also welcome, especially comments on issues and proposed changes in Association documents.

NASD, in conjunction with the other accrediting organizations that make up the Council on Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA), developed a website devoted to [Achievement and Quality: Higher Education in the Arts](#) to assist individuals and institutions. This website is rich with information and resources that reflect a basic consensus by the representatives of over 1000 accredited institutions and programs across the disciplines of art and design, dance, music, and theatre who seek broader public understanding of the nature of what they do and how they evaluate it as experienced professionals. A link to the website may also be found on the <http://www.arts-accredit.org> home page.

## ANNUAL MEETINGS

NASD meets every year during mid-September. All NASD meetings focus on professional development, while some also address larger questions of policy.

You are encouraged to attend the national meetings, not just as a professional obligation, and not only because NASD benefits from your participation, but because of what you can take home with you in the form of useful information, new contacts, and renewed friendships.



## CONCLUSION

In the end, NASD is like every other organization. You get out what you put in. But there are some simple steps you can take. To benefit immediately and often from NASD's services:

First, stay familiar with the NASD website and NASD publications, especially those related to the accreditation process. These documents may be able to answer a question before it turns into a problem. Become familiar with the NASD standards and accreditation philosophy.

Second, if you do have a question or concern, [contact the National Office](#). The National Office staff will do its best to answer your questions or direct you to additional sources of information.

Third, if you are an institutional representative to NASD, you are a conduit for information. Make sure you keep your faculty and administration informed about the things they need to know, and about how NASD may be able to help them.

Finally, we ask you to work with NASD to anticipate your needs. It is relatively easy for NASD to deal with institutional concerns in advance, but only when the staff, the Commission, or the appropriate Committee has been made aware of them.

In other words, it's in your best interest to use NASD. The Association exists to serve.