

20 Projects, €840,000: Next Steps Strengthens Dance in Hesse

Berlin, 8 October 2026

In its third call for proposals, the Next Steps funding programme is supporting 20 projects from the professional dance scene in Hesse with a total of around €840,000. At its meeting on 23 September 2026, the jury – Sofie Luckhardt, André Schallenberg, Honji Wang and Heike Wrede – selected 13 projects in Funding Line A, each receiving one-year funding of €5,000 to €25,000, and 7 projects in Funding Line B, each receiving two-year funding of up to €100,000 in total.

A total of 56 applications were submitted this round. The call was open to dance artists and ensembles as well as theatres, production houses, artist networks and universities. The selected projects reflect the diversity of Hesse's dance scene, ranging from artistic productions and research to initiatives that develop new forms of collaboration and sustainable structures.

Jury statement: “The applications show how many artistic signatures and ideas of dance shape the scene in Hesse. Development knows no age and follows no prescribed path. Dance becomes powerful when people trust their own voice and story and create something of their own from it. Artists need spaces where they can meet, experiment, fail and grow. As a jury, we looked closely, listened and shared our perspectives. Because dance can make differences visible, build community and bring people together.”

“Dance is an immediate art form that can reach people in all their diversity and open up new perspectives on how we live together as a society – for the Crespo Foundation, this holds particular potential. By increasing the funding for Next Steps, we are responding to the great need for support, raising the funding rate and expanding the artistic and structural scope for action of professional dance artists,” says Christiane Riedel, Member of the Executive Board of the Crespo Foundation.

Madeline Ritter, Executive and Artistic Director of Bureau Ritter, puts the expansion into context: “Thanks to the generous increase in funding, we can now – and in the coming funding rounds through 2030 – support significantly more dance artists in Hesse. As a result, the Next Steps network is growing noticeably. It is important to us that networking and support for the grantees extend beyond their individual projects: with Next Steps PLUS, we continue to support alumni after their projects have ended, and with the new format Next Steps TanzLokal, we are creating an annual meeting point for exchange and encounter in different cities across Hesse.”

Next Steps is implemented by the non-profit cultural organisation Bureau Ritter with the support of the Crespo Foundation. Since 2024, the programme has been supporting the artistic development and the strengthening of professional skills of dance artists in Hesse. In March 2026, the Crespo Foundation's Supervisory Board decided to continue Next Steps until 2030 with a total of €3.84 million.

The next call for Funding Line A will take place in spring 2027. Further information on the call and the programme: www.next-steps-hessen.de

Projects funded in the third call for applications:

Funding Strand A

Applicant: Angelo Berber / SoulCial – Förderverein für Jugend- und Hip Hop Kultur e.V., Linden

Project: SHIFT

Operating under the umbrella of the association SoulCial from Linden, Angelo Berber, Artur Grabowski, and Tizian Arnholdt are using their second round of Next Steps funding to expand the activities of their collective SHIFT into a year-round programme that strengthens popping at several locations across Hesse. At its core are the weekly SHIFT Labs, which cover technique, style history and community values. In Community Classes, experienced popping dancers from all over Germany pass on their knowledge. At the public Culture Sessions, pioneers of the scene meet the younger generation – in conversations, on panels and at jams. In a heavily male-dominated field, Women4Women creates spaces by women for women: invited female teachers shape these spaces and pass on what cannot be conveyed from a male perspective.

Applicant: Caroline Creutzburg, Offenbach

Project: I See A Darkness (AT)

In a choreographic research project, Caroline Creutzburg explores how grief lingers in the body. The starting point is a loss she experienced shortly before puberty, which seems to be returning almost 30 years later in the form of diffuse symptoms: migraines, muscle pain, heaviness, exhaustion. The movement material is based on the vaulting figures she practised daily on a wooden horse during her time of grief, figures that always lack another body: without the moving horse, they never fully make sense. Now forty, the choreographer returns to vaulting and traces how the routine of constant repetition provides stability and what the movements evoke in her today.

Applicant: Eslam Elnebishy, Frankfurt am Main

Project: Side by Side

Eslam Elnebishy and Patscharaporn Distakul, both previously funded by Next Steps, have developed two solos co-produced by Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm: “Yet to Come” and “The Weight of Tending”. Both explore the theme of migration through the body: “Yet to Come” takes the 2011 Egyptian revolution as its starting point, while “The Weight of Tending” draws on the domestic rituals of second-generation Thai migrants. The project now supports the joint distribution of both works, ideally as a double bill. Together with seasoned producer Katja Armknecht, the two artists are developing touring materials and securing guest performances at festivals and venues across Germany and Europe. In two creation labs, they will also share their working methods and experiences with the Frankfurt dance scene.

Applicant: Alicia Anais Fuentes Sifuentes, Heusenstamm

Project: Fuentes Sifuentes

The title “Fuentes Sifuentes” refers to the artist's family name and its meaning in Spanish: “springs” or “sources”. The name comes from her late father, with whose family there is little contact. From this absence, she develops an autobiographical solo about origin, loss and belonging. Tracing her roots, she gathers memories, photographs and gestures and travels to Peru to research the scissors dance (Danza de las Tijeras). In it, she looks for resonances – combat, risk and endurance – with her own movement language, breaking. In the studio, she translates the material into movement. The building up and breaking open of forms becomes an image of identity as an ongoing process – between arriving and moving on, control and letting go.

Applicant: Malin Harff, Gießen

Projekt: 17 Ways of Laziness

Gießen-based artist Malin Harff turns the paradox of living with an energy-limiting condition within a physically performance-driven art form into new choreographic strategies that consistently take the body's conditions as their starting point. At the heart of the project is an artistic toolbox at the intersection of physical practice, thematic research and access aesthetics. The research is structured in three interwoven strands: a lying-down choreographic perspective, an engagement with themes such as disability grief, disability joy and ableism, and accessibility as an aesthetic principle. Ongoing mentoring with disabled choreographers including Fia/Sophia Neises and Claire Cunningham helps to reflect on and sharpen the process.

Applicant: René Alejandro Huari Mateus, Frankfurt am Main

Project: baby d. deutschland

What if a telenovela with postmigrant and queer-feminist perspectives had been a huge success on German television? René Alejandro Huari Mateus stages the live finale of such a fictional series at Produktionshaus NAXOS – as a studio setting with an audience, danced and spoken by a predominantly postmigrant ensemble of established artists who have helped shape the region's cultural scene for years. The project responds to the rise in far-right crime in Hesse and the radicalisation of ever younger people. The work examines how the narrative patterns of the telenovela – clear-cut good-versus-evil schemes, emotional escalation, disguise and revelation – resemble strategies of far-right radicalisation. Through choreography, it becomes visible how ideologies inscribe themselves into gestures.

Applicant: Hanna Launikovich, Frankfurt am Main

Project: she-zoo/schizo/ШІЗА

Since 2020, thousands of people in Belarus have been politically persecuted, imprisoned and tortured – often simply for their activity on social media. Hanna Launikovich, who cannot safely

return to her home country because of her support for the protests, dedicates her first full-length solo to these people. Drawing on testimonies from former political prisoners, she choreographs body, sound and light without claiming the prisoners' experiences as her own. She also confronts her own fear, which has followed her into exile. The performance invites audiences to reflect on how much they take for granted the ability to sit safely in a theatre – while elsewhere, even a single like can be dangerous.

Applicant: Pauline Michel, Offenbach

Project: Euphorie + Übelkeit

“Euphorie + Übelkeit” (Euphoria + Nausea) is a choreographic research project on vertigo – the moment when the sense of one's own body and what the eyes see drift apart: a state between euphoria and nausea, adrenaline and loss of control. The choreographer asks how this state can be explored through dance. Following a whirling workshop with Ziya Azazi and a literature review, she invites a dancer, a musician and a video artist to a two-week studio phase, accompanied by a dramaturg. Together they explore how spinning movements and visual and acoustic glitches can make vertigo tangible for the audience – without making them feel sick themselves. The research lays the foundation for her first independent stage production.

Applicant: kemelo sehlapelo, Gießen

Project: [DIPTYCH] / Something, like a stone, can heal you [mad is a place]

The research project [DIPTYCH] engages with sexualised and gender-based violence – from rape to femicide – and explores its personal, public and political consequences. At its core is the question of how experiences of violence inscribe themselves in the body and how they can be processed through physical practice. The image of the diptych serves as a dramaturgical structure: the body oscillates between rage and pleasure – a back-and-forth that pushes it to its limits. In research phases in Cape Town and Frankfurt, kemelo sehlapelo works with Butoh, Afro-Butoh and Krump, exploring the destruction, rejection, and possession of the affected body through these dance forms, while asking what care can look like for a body that has experienced violence.

Applicant: Sophie Sengle, Kassel

Projekt: Queer Waters

Building on previous research, the Kassel-based performance collective around Sophie Sengle, founded in 2025, is developing “Queer Waters” into a piece that adapts modularly to different locations – from theatres to cinema foyers. At its centre are water, glass and bodies: circular movements of pouring, balancing and letting go translate queer biographies into choreographic images beyond linear time. In labs at queer centres in Kassel and Marburg, the artists conduct research together with the community – through letter writing, object work and sound recordings. The resulting impulses feed directly into the work. At the same time, the young collective is building up its structures, for example through permanent collaborations in dramaturgy, sound and costume.

Applicant: Victoria Söntgen, Frankfurt am Main

Project: Tanz ins Alter – Bewegungsimpulse für Senior*innen

Dancer, choreographer and dance educator Victoria Söntgen brings professional dance to care homes in Hesse with “Tanz ins Alter” (Dancing into Old Age). She is interested in how dance can remain a form of expression, a means of communication and a source of joy even in old age. Each visit begins with the presentation of a dance piece, after which the residents get moving themselves. Music and rhythm connect with memories. Instead of learning a fixed sequence of steps, the seniors follow their own impulses. This means that people with limited mobility can also take part. A guide and digital materials ensure that the care homes can continue the formats after the project has ended.

Applicant: Stadttheater Gießen

Project: DAS IST NICHT DAS ENDE. – Creating Knots (AT)

With “Creating Knots” (working title), the dance ensemble of Stadttheater Gießen is creating a space for artistic development in which dance educators in Central Hesse can network and develop professionally. For the festival “DAS IST NICHT DAS ENDE.”, an accompanying outreach programme is being developed together with the Master programme Contemporary Dance Education (MA CoDE) at HfMDK Frankfurt. In addition, the artist Claire Vivianne Sobottke leads a community project lasting several weeks with students from the Master programme Choreography and Performance (MA CuP) at JLU Gießen. In peer-to-peer formats, participants reflect on dance education and on access and learning formats and develop them further, building a lasting network in the region.

Applicant: Christian Zacharas, Kassel

Project: Ich spreche Boogaloo

On stage, the dance styles popping and boogaloo usually appear only as brief interludes. In “Ich spreche Boogaloo” (I Speak Boogaloo), Christian Zacharas makes them the core language of an entire piece for three performers. The idea emerged during the first Next Steps funding of the popping collective SHIFT and is now becoming a production in its own right. The starting point is a catalogue of movement principles from both styles, developed out of everyday actions: a cough, for example, becomes a hit – the sharp tensing of the muscles on the beat. The origins and inner logic of these dance forms are preserved while new theatrical meanings emerge. Audiences unfamiliar with popping and boogaloo should leave the performance understanding what defines them – without any explanation.

Funding Strand B

Applicant: Betina Fischer / Sunny Side Swing Studio, Darmstadt

Project: Percussive Dance – Rhythmus, Körper, Kulturelles Erbe

Lindy Hop emerged in Harlem in the 1930s, in close interplay between African American dancers and jazz music. Betina Fischer has been teaching this dance style for over 15 years, since 2020 at her own Sunny Side Swing Studio in Darmstadt. As a white dance teacher, she asks herself how she can responsibly teach a Black American art form without coming from its cultural context herself. In two multi-day workshops, teachers who bring this connection with them lead the classes. The focus is on tap dance, solo jazz, body percussion and stepping, dance forms that treat the body as an instrument. An evening with a live jazz band and conversations about the cultural roots round off the programme, through which she seeks to make a conscious contribution to raising awareness of and appreciation for the origins of this art form.

Applicant: Miranda Glikson / spahn+glikson, Marburg

Project: ROTATIONS

In 2026 Miranda Glikson and Lea Spahn founded the ROTATIONS festival to bring contemporary dance to Marburg as a space for participation and encounter, in a city where it has so far had little visibility. Over three festival days, people with and without dance experience become co-creators – in performances in public space, inclusive formats and workshops. Following the pilot edition, Next Steps is now also supporting the festival in 2027 and 2028. New additions include a platform for emerging dance artists from the region, a site-specific commission and a schools programme. Together with Theater neben dem Turm, the Waggonhalle, the University of Marburg and the Schultheaternetzwerk Marburg-Gießen, ROTATIONS is thus becoming firmly established and strengthens dance in Hesse beyond the major cities.

Applicant: Nora Goßmann / HOUSEaHOLICS e. V., Frankfurt am Main

Projekt: 3 Generations: House Without Borders

HOUSEaHOLICS is receiving Next Steps funding for the third time. Over the next two years, the collective will consolidate its structures and advance its artistic development. Partnerships with MOMEM, Mousonturm and Kinderschutzbund Frankfurt, among others, secure long-term access to spaces, audiences and social legitimacy. Jams, the House Lab (Jack & Legacy) and a battle with intensive workshops improve working conditions for dance artists in Hesse through curated showcases, regional networking and knowledge transfer with international pioneers. For the first time, the collective is bringing House Dance to stages in Hesse. A period of research and work-in-progress showings mark the first steps towards making this happen.

Applicant: Sãm Sabor, Frankfurt am Main

Project: Dialectics of Dance (DoD)

Dancers from hip-hop and club styles bring their own choreographic knowledge, yet in Hesse they have few opportunities to develop it together. Sãm Sabor, who has supported artists from these scenes for years as a dramaturg and dance educator, wants to change this with “Dialectics of Dance”, his first project of his own. Under the choreographic direction of kemelo sehlapelo, six artists from whacking, boogaloo, breaking, hip-hop and house develop material over the course of a year – in the studio and in urban space. The styles are not blended but brought into dialogue with one another. Alongside the project, exchange sessions with choreographers take place in Hamburg and North Rhine-Westphalia. In the second year, this material is shaped into a production for both stage and public space. The project also negotiates what counts as contemporary dance – and therefore what is recognised in programming and funding.

Applicant: Mareike Uhl, Frankfurt am Main

Project: Frankfurter Tanzgeschichte(n)

Frankfurt's independent dance scene has a rich and diverse history that has so far been barely documented. With “Frankfurter Tanzgeschichte(n)” Mareike Uhl and Frédéric De Carlo make memories, artistic expertise and embodied knowledge from the 1970s to the present publicly accessible on a digital platform. It is based on 50 recorded and transcribed conversations with members of the scene, from dancers and choreographers to producers, dramaturgs and technicians. Complemented by visualisations, timelines and archival material, it is becoming a growing, low-barrier resource for the dance community, academia, education and cultural policy that sheds light on the scene's networks, working conditions and artistic perspectives.

Applicant: Amelia Uzategui Bonilla / T.I.A. dance productions – Korner & Uzategui Bonilla GbR, Offenbach

Project: Labore für kreative Audiodeskription im Tanz – Hessen

Over two years, the “Labore für kreative Audiodeskription im Tanz – Hessen” (Labs for Creative Audio Description in Dance – Hesse) see the collective T.I.A. dance productions, together with Theater neben dem Turm, adapt a concept from tanzhaus nrw for Marburg, the “City of the Blind”. With Amelia Uzategui Bonilla, Lilian Korner, and Hannah Dewor as its core members, the collective understands accessibility not as a service, but as a choreographic tool. In residencies, audible choreographies are created from music, rhythm and voices, and in the second year tactile ones as well. Community labs bring together blind, visually impaired and sighted people, while youth labs at special needs schools in Frankfurt, Friedberg and Marburg inspire students to dance. The project culminates in a guest performance of T.I.A.'s participatory drag show “Lilith”, in which participants from the community labs contribute their own ideas.

Applicant: May Zarhy / KulturNetz Kassel e.V.

Project: Kassel Summer Program of Somatic & Dance Practices

Choreographer May Zarhy and producer Mareike Uhl are establishing a five-week continuing education and research programme in Kassel that combines contemporary dance and somatic practices and is aimed at the regional, national and international dance community. Its focus is on maintaining dancers' health and enabling long careers. Next Steps is funding the first two editions in 2027 and 2028. At least half of the participants come from Hesse; they pay a reduced participation fee and receive travel and accommodation grants. Alongside international guests such as Deborah Hay, local artists from the independent scene and the Staatstheater teach on the programme. Public evenings and community formats open the programme up to the city and strengthen Kassel as a place for dance.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Press contact

Esther Ningelgen

Head of Communications, Bureau Ritter

Email: e.ningelgen@bureau-ritter.de

Phone: +49 (0)30 402033204

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