

Hive Mind—Benefits of Turnover

a crowd-sourced column

The Hive Mind is a crowd-sourced column with readers sharing insights about different subjects. Our thanks to caller Scott Higgs, column coordinator, and to the participants. In this issue: Some groups have decades of history, managed by the same people. Other groups have frequent turnover in key roles, or work to ensure turnover. In principle, most of us see the benefits of turnover, but in practice it can be hard to find the right balance between welcoming new leadership and maintaining continuity.

Gaye Fifer of Pittsburgh, PA says:

A couple of years ago we noticed as a community that attendance was dropping off and the energy at dances was not so enthusiastic and positive. One of our younger dancers designed a survey for dancers to complete, trying to assess interest, concerns, issues and commitment. We used hard copies at the dance, our email list, and Facebook to distribute surveys. We received 73 completed surveys, indicating to us that there was a core of committed dancers who cared enough to make their opinions known. We then called a community meeting, where 22 folks came to discuss problems and solutions. A number of them were new, young dancers, interested in being involved. Out of that meeting came some beginning steps to address safety and comfort at the dances (posters on walls, etc.) and a committee was formed to come up with bylaws for a new leadership team (Contra Council). We used CDSS as a resource for writing these bylaws* and ours were approved at a meeting of the community at one of the Friday dances. We then proceeded to recruit nominees for the Council and had our first election in May 2015. We elected nine council members, each for a three year term. Eventually, there will be three new folks elected each year as a third of the council rotates off. There was an effort made to recruit a mix of ages, interests (callers, musicians, dancers) and experience. The group of community members elected has great meetings! In my opinion, this is due to the fact that we have no big egos, but a willingness to work for the good of the community. We are well on our way to nurturing and maintaining a healthy dance community.

Luke Donforth of Burlington, VT says:

“I can’t let go of the responsibility, because there’s no one else to do it” is a phrase that seems to come up a lot when talking with volunteer organizations doing good work. Unfortunately, it’s often a mask for “there’s no one else to do it because I can’t let go of the responsibility.” If you’re looking to recruit new blood to a board, you better make sure there’s room for those people, and part of that means having the old guard transition out.

The easiest solution I know is term limits. The specifics might need to be tailored for your organization, but two terms of three years is a long time for someone to be doing a volunteer position. A lot will change in that time, but the person might not. Nonprofit organizational best-practices, as well as investors and donors in nonprofits, call for term limits. That doesn’t include musical chairs, where there’s a term limit on positions but the same folks rotate through them. It makes for oligarchies in government, and severs connections to the community for folk groups. Ensuring traditions continue means giving them, whole-heartedly, away.

* <http://www.cdss.org/support-services/insurance-group-services/nonprofit-tax-exemption#sample-documents>

Next time we’ll be talking about... **Welcoming New Dancers**

How do you make new dancers feel welcome, comfortable, safe, and eager to return? Do designated “dance ambassadors” seek out newbies? If you offer free admission, do you collect information (e.g., email address) in return? Do you follow-up? Among the strategies you have tried, which have proved to be more or less successful?

Please share your stories at www.cdss.org/hive before January 18, 2017. We welcome both success stories and cautionary tales—all give helpful perspective.