

CDSS Contra Task Group Surveys 480 Contra Dance Callers!

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Do you know 500 people who call contra dances? We do! Last spring the CDSS Contra Dance Task Group sent a survey to all the contra dance callers we could find. 480 completed the whole long survey. The results are fascinating and a summary of findings is available [here on our website](#).

Among the highlights:

- Callers responded from 45 states in the US, plus 6 provinces in Canada and 9 other countries (with Denmark, Australia and England being most frequent).
- 75% of respondents were over the age of 50 while 8% of the respondents were under 30. Men and women were represented pretty equally among respondents.
- There is tremendous diversity in the dances people call for – in size, level of experience and frequency of dancing.
- A number of callers don't think of themselves as just contra callers since they call a wide variety of kinds of dances (e.g., squares, mixers, big circle) depending on the situation.
- A great many callers (40%) are calling less than they would like. Only 20% are calling more than 10 times a year.
- Challenges callers face include limited opportunity to call, calling for groups with very mixed experience, marketing oneself as a caller, dealing with issues in the dance community, working with the band, and feeling burned out by trying to do too much.
- Asked how they learned to call, callers listed dozens of websites, books and other sources. Many of these are in the process of being added to the existing CDSS contra dance resources page. Watch this space for an announcement when this goes live!
- Most callers learned by observing other callers but they also learned in other ways such as being mentored (usually informally) and attending callers' workshops.
- Those who had experience with callers collectives found them to be an excellent way to get feedback and improve one's skills – as well as to try out new dances.
- There is quite a bit of interest in having an online database of dances as well as there being identified challenges around setting something like this up. We are going to explore some possibilities.
- Many other needs were identified and there were also many suggestions for new resources. See the full report for more details!

We hope you find the report interesting and useful. Doing the survey has been a lot of fun for us. We'll be pursuing a number of areas identified in the survey to increase the resources available to callers and would welcome your help.

If you are interested in helping, look at our list of priorities (last slide in the PDF). Then email volunteers@cdss.org. Please put "Contra Dance Task Group" in the subject of the email. Also, state which item you are interested in and how you think you may be able to contribute. Watch our blog for more news about next steps in moving some of these ideas forward.

Enjoy!

CDSS Contra Dance Task Group

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