

Southwest Regional Organizers Conference (SWROC): From Conference to COALITION

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by Linda Henry, CDSS Outreach Manager

Here's a glimpse of history-in-the-making for dance communities throughout the Southwestern U.S...



PHOTO: Ben Werner

On September 19, 2014, an enthusiastic crowd of 78 dance organizers from the Southwest (AZ, CA, CO, NM, NV, OK, TX, UT) and beyond (MA, TN) converged at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. They represented contra, English country, square, and gender-neutral dance communities. Whether they had met at regional dance weekends or were total strangers, their shared passion for dance organizing sparked conversations from the minute they arrived.

The weekend was packed with pertinent workshop sessions covering three over-arching areas: Strengthening Your Organization, Improving Your Dance, and Growing the Market. For further glimpses of the program, follow these links to the [schedule](#), [session descriptions](#), [workshop leaders](#), and [archived materials](#) from all sessions.

Beyond the structured sessions, participants enjoyed sharing meals, making new connections, and dancing together both evenings. Friday night we created an all-conference dance with calling and music by the participants, and on Saturday we swelled the ranks at the NM FolkMADS dance in Albuquerque.



PHOTO: Tom Leith



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An especially pivotal discussion happened during a session called "Crossing the Border: Connecting groups within each state and throughout the region." With the help of Wendy Graham's skillful facilitation, twenty participants brainstormed ways to start collaborating about booking bands and callers, etc.

The session culminated with a BIG lightbulb moment that led to plans for a ground-breaking pilot project. This group will collaborate to create a tour for a well-known band to play for two consecutive dance weekends and travel from one event to the other, offering house concerts and workshops as they go. This type of tour has never happened in the Southwest and will open doors for bringing a new stream of talent to the entire region!

The group decided to keep the SWROC acronym and simply change the word "conference" to "coalition". This outcome is exactly what CDSS hopes to make possible through supporting regional conferences like this.

As the conference came to a close, we did a circle mixer that ended with finding our own "trail buddy." We talked in pairs about specific ways we'll be supporting each other to strengthen our home dances by using resources from the weekend. A parting circle left us feeling energized by the exponential ripple effect it will have. These 78 participants are now bringing

new resources, connections and energy to all their dance communities that each have 50-100+ members, reaching over 5,000 people!



PHOTO: Tom Leith

I'll end by thanking the MANY people who made SWROC possible. Members of the Steering Committee and Program Committee spent countless hours putting all the pieces into place. So here is a BIG THANK YOU to Ron and Linda Nieman, Nate Puffer, Annie Laskey, Erik Erhardt, Lisa Bertelli, Jeff Spero, and Michael Barraclough. We also greatly appreciate coordinator Deb Brunt and all Albuquerque volunteers who handled the local logistics.

We also thank the other co-sponsoring organizations ([New Mexico Folk Music & Dance Society](#) and [Phoenix Traditional Music & Dance](#)) and seven additional dance groups that helped organizers from their communities attend this conference.

For more information, see the [SWROC](#) website and [visit this link](#) for glimpses of previous conferences co-sponsored by CDSS. Questions? Contact Linda Henry, CDSS Outreach Manager.