

Affiliates Spoke, We Acted

By Kelsey Wells and Ben Williams

Last summer, we surveyed all of our (nearly 300!) Affiliates for the first time in more than a decade, hoping to establish a solid base understanding of these groups, hear about what more we can do to support them, and start thinking about what we can do together to advocate for participatory arts. We will be conducting a similar survey annually in order to keep broadening our understanding of Affiliates' needs. (The 2020 survey is out now!)

Half of our Affiliates completed the survey, and a few major themes emerged as we sorted through their responses. Emily and Katy published a preliminary report of our findings in the fall 2019 issue of the *CDSS News*. Here's what we've done since then.

Services and Renewals

One of the changes survey respondents requested was to make their Affiliate membership, nonprofit status, and insurance all renew at the same time. In April of this year, we launched a new way for Affiliates to renew, which includes all of our Affiliate services on one form with one payment (all available online!).

This is perhaps the simplest-sounding but largest action we've taken as a result of the survey. All Affiliates now have a renewal date of May 1, which simultaneously renews any other services they purchase from us. (For groups that join mid-year, we offer a prorated discount based on the month of joining.)

Communication

Another commonly mentioned request was for our Affiliate communications to better reach our Affiliate contacts. Remedying this is an ongoing process; it's hard to know that something's not reaching Affiliate representatives if they don't know they're missing it! The first small step we took was to ask all renewing groups to provide contact info for more than one person. We hope sending email newsletters, updates, and renewal notices to



LEFT: CDSS Affiliate Nashville Country Dancers (Nashville, TN; photo by Jack Koch).
BELOW: CDSS Affiliate Belfast Flying Shoes (Belfast, ME; photo by Corallina Breuer).



multiple representatives will help our messages be better distributed throughout groups.

We are also endeavoring to be more consistent in our communications to Affiliates. Our two main email newsletters for Affiliates, the "Affiliate eNews" and "Shop Talk," are each scheduled quarterly, which in the past year has proved to be overly ambitious. In 2020, we planned the full year in advance and are more confident that these messages will go out on our expected timeline. (Actually, Affiliates will get even more "Shop Talk" updates than usual, as we think shorter, more frequent messages are most helpful during the pandemic.)

Resources

Multiple survey respondents mentioned hearing best practices from other groups as a resource they value most. One of the ways we facilitate sharing this kind of information is through our series of Web Chats, which often feature presenters from outside CDSS. In the past few months, we've hosted Web Chats on building safe dance communities, connecting song organizers, and diversifying sources of income. In April, we also hosted a special Web Chat featuring 10 organizers sharing a variety of ways their groups are building connections within their communities while in-person events are on hold. This was our largest Web Chat ever, with more than 130 participants! For a closer glimpse of this exciting event,

check out the announcement on page 6, and visit cdss.org/ web-chats for video recordings and support materials from our seven previous Web Chats.

Our other big resource news is the relaunch of our expanded Resource Portal (cdss.org/portal). More information about the new Portal was published in the spring 2020 issue of the *CDSS News*; for Affiliates, the highlights are the various sections for organizers of different traditions and the "benefits of our shared traditions" section, which features writings that can be used to help advocate for participatory arts. We recently added an unplanned additional resource for organizers (cdss.org/distance-resources) that lists all of the ideas brought by participants in our April Web Chat. This resource is currently housed with our other COVID-19 tools but will be archived in the main Portal following the pandemic.

We also host and curate an online calendar of events. At the start of the pandemic, we updated the calendar to include a section for online-only events (it's been popping lately!) and one for cancelled in-person events. Both of

these sections are meant to give organizers another way of promoting info from their groups, whether it's online content or simply getting the word out about a cancelled event. Later this year, we are planning to connect the calendar to an events map, in addition to creating a separate map of Affiliates.



We are thankful to our Affiliates for providing their experience and knowledge—both through this survey and in general—so that we can learn, grow, and be strengthened by each other. If you are an organizer from one of our Affiliates, we would love to hear from you in this year's survey. We've added a number of questions specifically regarding your experiences dealing with physical distancing and how we can support you further moving forward. If you're not yet an Affiliate, we invite you to join and add your voice to our growing network. Particularly at this time, it's critically important that we're able to work collectively to weather this storm and come through it dancing, singing, and making music together.