

# CDSS Expands Its Support for Local Organizers: New Resources and How You Can Get Involved

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Emerald City Contra Dance, Seattle, WA, with Rodney Miller, Dave Bartley, Anita Anderson, Emma Anderson caller (photo by Doug Plummer)

**A**re you a local organizer? Want to start organizing? Are you an ally of local organizers who make the traditional dance, music, and song (TDMS) activities that you love happen? If so, we are thrilled to update you on our continued work to support local organizers. So read on... and get involved!

## Expanding organizer supports... what is this about anyway?



As reported in the Spring 2018 *News*, our survey of Canadian TDMS organizers clarified that many organizations are struggling and need support in order to continue and strengthen

the activities they organize. View the [article here](#) and the [full survey report here](#).

A follow-up survey of our US affiliate organizers in March-

April 2018 explored whether the Canadian findings resonated with US organizers. While there were some differences, the similarities among experiences were striking. For instance, as with the Canadian organizers, US organizers were most concerned with issues around attendance (see the [US report here](#)).

This spring, the CDSS Governing Board completed its 2019-2023 Strategic Direction (see pages 6-7 of this issue or [click here](#)). Supporting local organizers to create and sustain their own vibrant TDMS communities aligns perfectly with CDSS's mission, core values, and priority areas for the next five years.

CDSS has a long history of supporting organizers. We have co-sponsored regional conferences for social dance organizers for more than ten years, we have also offered countless scholarships and grants to local organizers launching new initiatives, and we've made insurance and nonprofit options available to CDSS Affiliates throughout the US. However, the arrival of our new Executive Director has given us the impetus and enthusiasm for expanding and strengthening the supports we offer.

## Recent actions taken on behalf of organizers

Over the last six months, we have implemented some of the top recommendations from the organizer studies.

## ORGANIZERS RESOURCE PORTAL



This summer we launched the new Organizers Resource Portal (aka “The Portal”), a section of the CDSS website that gathers a wide range of information in one place to help local organizers easily find information for planning and decision making. Currently The Portal houses CDSS-created resources as well as some key resources from other organizations and events. Updating it will be an ongoing project, and we’ll be reaching out to YOU for help. You can find [The Portal here](#).

## WEB CHAT SERIES



In June, we launched a web chat series to provide a live learning opportunity on topics of importance to organizers in communities throughout North America.

Our first web chat centered around boosting attendance,

with 65 organizers participating in the live discussion. We are invigorated by the feedback and are planning another web chat for September 20th. Please refer to the announcement on page 5 for details on how to participate. The audio/slides from the first web chat are posted in The Portal, and you can find out about upcoming web chats by joining the new organizer e-blast list ([bit.ly/2sqQr4B](http://bit.ly/2sqQr4B)).

## SHOP TALK ORGANIZERS E-BLAST

Our third new initiative was launched in August. Four times a year, the *Shop Talk* e-blasts will offer interesting resources, highlight best practices, and share inspirational stories. We’ll also use these quarterly emails to announce upcoming learning opportunities

such as web chats or organizer conferences. Sign up at [bit.ly/2sqQr4B](http://bit.ly/2sqQr4B).



## Looking to the Future, and YOUR help!

As the individuals leading this work on behalf of CDSS, we are excited about how these initiatives will support local organizers. If we can harness **YOUR HELP**, our efforts will be even more successful, and we can continue to build on the work we’re doing.

Here are some ways to get involved:

- **Sign up for Shop Talk:** If you aren’t already on our organizer e-blast list, please consider joining and also contributing material. [bit.ly/2sqQr4B](http://bit.ly/2sqQr4B)
- **Submit resources for The Portal:** If you’re proud of the work your community is doing, we encourage you to submit resources/ideas/samples/stories that you think other organizers will find useful. While we have a fair amount of resources to date, your additions will make it even better. Contribute at [cdss.org/share-your-resource](http://cdss.org/share-your-resource)
- **Join CDSS** Becoming an individual/family or Affiliate group member not only provides financial support to CDSS, but it also allows us to approach large funders from a strengthened position, showing our reach throughout North America. If you appreciate the work we do, please promote CDSS membership, and consider an additional donation to support this work! [Join/Renew](#)

All of us at CDSS are invested in the work of local organizers as they make the traditions we love happen. Many of the staff and Governing Board members are local organizers of TDMS activities so we know the heavy lifting involved. We are all strengthened by working together, sharing what we know, and encouraging each other to continue to build thriving traditions for the decades and generations to come. Let’s keep at it together!

## Two Resources Promoted in The CDSS Organizers' Portal

*Note: While CDSS is happy to promote these resources, we do not endorse specific dances or callers.*

### **The Caller's Box**

Michael Dyck and Chris Page have built a contra dance database website, The Caller's Box, with the generous help from many dance authors. The site is at [biblio.org/contradance/thecallersbox](http://biblio.org/contradance/thecallersbox)

This (mostly) contra dance database currently includes 12,000 dances:

- 5,000 have viewable instructions
- 4,000 have links to instructions

Current search options include author, title, formation, and figures. You can search the figures of (most) dances even when we don't have permission to show the figures.

This will always be a work in progress. Those interested in contributing or removing their dances are encouraged to contact Michael and Chris at [chrispage+thecallersbox@gmail.com](mailto:chrispage+thecallersbox@gmail.com) or follow the link from the site's FAQ.

### **The Caller Directory**

Instructed participatory dance requires dancers, music, and, naturally, an instructor. Contra caller, dancer, and organizer Luke Donforth (based in Burlington, VT) has created a directory to help organizers find callers, and callers be found by organizers of regular dances or special events.

The Caller Directory is viewable at <http://tinyurl.com/hnb72wv>. It's a spreadsheet listing callers, their contact information, and what types of dances they call. It also provides space for references, video links, and a comment from each caller.

As Luke admits, there are other databases out there. For instance, The Dance Gypsy, Contra Dance Links and the Dance Database all contain information about

callers; and Luke gives thanks to the folks who created and maintain them. His Caller Directory is a little different in a couple ways:

- **It's focused exclusively on callers.** You're not sorting through any other information when looking for a caller.
- **It's entirely self-submitted.** Callers "hang their shingle" and list themselves by filling out the form at [tinyurl.com/yb5nyooj](http://tinyurl.com/yb5nyooj). Doing so sends them a link to maintain their own information.
- **It's sortable.** The default organization for the sheet is by states; but if you're comfortable using a spreadsheet, you can organize and filter to your heart's content. Want someone to call a gender free wedding in Montana? It'll help you find them.

There are currently 141 callers listed, from 32 US states and 3 different countries. The database grew out of Luke's efforts to help people find callers for regular dances and special events that he couldn't call. For a fun view of where it might help you find a caller; check out the heatmap put together by Jeff Kaufman ([trycontra.com/callers-heatmap](http://trycontra.com/callers-heatmap)), an outgrowth of his Try Contra website which helps folks find dances near them.



When developing the directory, Luke received supportive and constructive comments from callers on the Shared Weight caller discussion listserv. The directory is as useful as people make it. If you're a caller, consider listing yourself by filling out the submission form. If you're an organizer, take a look and possibly find a caller nearby that wasn't on your radar.

*Note: As it is self-submitted, there is no vetting or implied endorsement of callers on the directory. If you have questions or comments about the directory, reach out to Luke at [calling.luke@gmail.com](mailto:calling.luke@gmail.com).*