

# Talking Square

by Rima Dael, CDSS Executive Director



I had the privilege of sitting on a national organization panel at the National Square Dance Convention this summer in Springfield, Massachusetts. Organizational colleagues included: CALLERLAB (<http://www.callerlab.org>), Contralab (<http://www.contralab.net>), Alliance of Round, Traditional and Square-Dance (<http://www.arts-dance.org>), United Square Dancers of America (<http://www.usda.org>), Roundalab (<http://www.roundalab.org>) and the Canadian Square and Round Dance Society (<http://www.csrds.ca>).

Topics of discussion included: 1) What are the challenges facing folk dancing today?, 2) What does your organization consider the greatest priorities to address?, 3) Are there possibilities of sharing and coordinating projects to address these issues together?, 4) What are your near term goals (next five years)?, and 5) What needs to happen so that we can expect active participation in the various forms of dance for the next one hundred years?

I shared that CDSS thinks the biggest challenge for our dance, music and song communities is time and money. With enough of both, all problems or challenges could be solved, but given that both time and money are scarce resources—for all nonprofits and volunteer groups—we focus on three ways to help our communities be resilient: building a pipeline of dancers, callers, musicians and organizers; problem identification/problem solving through sharing common issues and best practices; communication of best practices online and offline.\*

All the panelists shared concerns around time, money and cultivating volunteers needed to help keep our organizations going, and involving the younger folks in stewarding our art forms. Ironically, with questions raised about how to involve youth, none were present in the conversation. I posed that we need to ask our younger constituents how to better engage them, and to consider defining what

we mean when we say “youth”—in some instances, it could mean 40 or under, or students K–12, or young adults. There was a lot of discussion around involving next generation and youth participants. CDSS was the only organization on the panel that promotes intergenerational programs and has weeklong summer camps that teach kids, youth and young adults dance, music and song skills.

It was an interesting discussion as the national organizations represented are all arts service organizations that serve their membership with programs and services from insurance to skill-building and best practice workshops. One thing we can learn from the Modern Western Square Dance groups are how connected many of them are with their local/regional Tourism Boards and the use of assisted hearing devices that are in sync with the caller’s microphone; these are two areas CDSS would like to investigate more. David Millstone, CDSS president, also in attendance at the discussion (and, in his teacher/caller’s role, leading several dance workshops at the Convention), shared with the panel and audience the new New Hampshire Art Council social dance map (<http://www.nh.gov/folklife/learning-center/traditions/live-free-dance.htm>), based on West Virginia’s Mountain Trail Dance Map (<http://www.mountaintancetrail.org/dance-schedule>).

It was great to see so many folks in downtown Springfield, from all over the country, dressed in their formal square dance attire. This was the Convention’s first visit to New England; we look forward to seeing them again soon.

\* These are three areas CDSS has identified through our Strategic Direction, <http://www.cdss.org/strategic-direction-2014-to-2017.html>, and specifically articulated in the “CDSS Theory of Change” section in our recent Education Report, <http://www.cdss.org/education.html>.

Rima, third from right (photo by David Millstone)