

News from Canada—A Survey of Canadian Traditional Dance, Music, and Song Organizers

by Emily L. Addison, Ottawa, Canada

Are you a local organizer of traditional dance, music, or song (TDMS)? If you are, my guess is that you're very committed to your particular tradition, and as we all know it can take a LOT of energy to organize TDMS events. Maybe you're an organizer who lives in Canada. If so, this article should be right up your alley. And if not, we think you'll find information below interesting none-the-less!

As a North American organization, CDSS has put substantial energy towards enhancing our support for TDMS in Canada over the past few years. As part of this commitment, we conducted an extensive survey in November 2016, reaching out to more than 600 organizers throughout the country. We heard from almost 200 individuals with representation from all provinces and territories. Our goal was to learn how to best support TDMS organizers in Canada. To do so we focused our questions on learning who was organizing what, the successes they were experiencing, the challenges they

face, and the supports they would find helpful. We're thrilled to present a bit of what we learned in this article. (You can find the full report at www.cdss.org/cn-survey.)

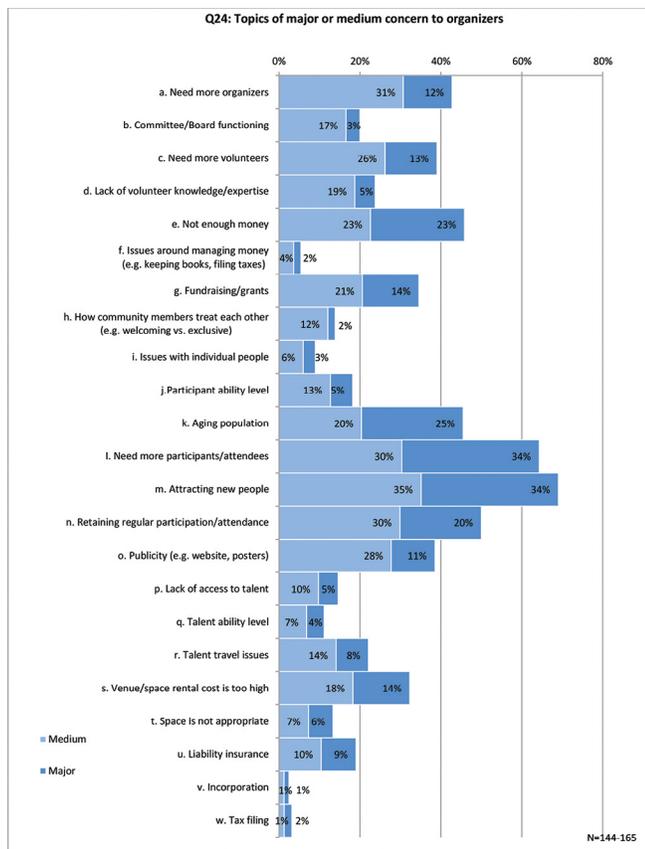


Who is organizing what in Canada?

We were excited to hear from organizers spanning a wide range of traditions. Two fifths of respondents organize TDMS events within CDSS's historical core traditions (e.g., morris dance; contra dance; ECD; English traditional song) while another two fifths organize Canadian-evolved traditions (e.g., fiddle music from Manitoba; Cape Breton Square Dance). The other one fifth organize other folk-based traditions (e.g., Scottish Country Dance; Scandinavian music). The vast majority of these organizers are involved in events that are participatory in nature rather than purely performance-based. These are folk traditions after all! Most organizers also had fairly regular events, with two thirds holding at least one event per month.

A few other facts about the organizers:

- 10% of respondents completed the survey in French (US readers: Canada has two official languages and this was CDSS's first substantial effort to engage Canadians in both languages).
- Individuals live and organize in a wide range of locations. While many organize events in large urban centres, many others are located in small towns located far from urban centres. And given Canada's sparse population, even those in large urban centres are often isolated.
- The majority of organizers were over age 50.
- Most organizers are working in a small teams or in larger committees/groups although approximately half of those groups are not officially incorporated.



Current challenges and concerns facing organizers

CDSS very much wanted to hear about the challenges that Canadian organizers currently face so that we can better support them in overcoming those struggles. We heard about many issues, each valid whether or not they were shared by large numbers of organizers (i.e., one organizer's most challenging issue could mean the continuation or end for that TDMS community). The top five most commonly reported challenges (known to organizers in the US as well) were:

1. Attendance-related issues (e.g., needing more participants/attendees; attracting new people; converting new people to regular participants; retaining their current group of regulars; an aging population)
2. Financial-related issues (e.g., lack of revenue at least in part linked to attendance; venue, insurance and/or talent costs)
3. Organizer/volunteer-related issues (e.g., current organizers having too much work to do; needing more organizers and volunteers; lack of knowledge/expertise; community and/or board functioning)
4. Promotion, linked to attendance (e.g., how to effectively publicize events; help to create/maintain publicity material)
5. Talent, linked in part to finances (e.g., access to talent; talent ability level; not having enough money to pay talent)

You can dig further into each of these challenges as well as the others (e.g., insurance; venues; US-CAN border issues) by reading the full report.

Supports most needed by local organizers

While some organizers currently receive support from umbrella organizations (CDSS or others), Canadian organizers were clearly interested in receiving more support to help them in the important work (mostly volunteer!) that they do. Many types of supports were explored—here are the top three of interest to most organizers (in no particular order):

1. Help with funding (e.g., wanting small and/or one-off grants for special projects; ongoing grants for operational costs; wanting scholarships to pay for organizer training; help to access various sources of money such as government, foundations, or other sponsorship).
2. Help with sharing information and networking across the wider TDMS community (e.g., wanting a central website with links to online resources for organizers; a calendar of Canadian TDMS events; sharing of best practices)
3. Help with promotion and other ways of increasing attendance (e.g., help with publicity generally; help with cross-promotion; training for specific advertising tools)

Next steps for CDSS, organizers generally, and YOU?

In addition to the full report, the CDSS Board and Staff received recommendations for next steps. Some are already being acted upon. Of interest to our wider membership is that with the release of the Canadian survey report, we are launching a follow-up survey of US TDMS organizers. **(If you are a US organizer, we would love to hear from you! Click on the survey link at cdss.org/cn-survey and submit by April 13th.)**

In addition, we are launching a new CDSS email-news specifically for organizers. We will send out occasional e-blasts with resources and stories meant to connect, support, and inspire organizers. **(You can join the email list at cdss.org/cn-survey.)** The findings of the survey have also prompted us to revamp the organizer section of our website. This work will take a few months to complete, but we hope to make the resources section more user-friendly and include additional resources. While these are not Canadian-specific, they will also benefit Canadian organizers. Canadian-specific recommendations will be implemented as well.

In the meantime, we encourage organizers to reach out to each other and provide supports where you can. Whether it's setting up a casual organizers lunch discussion while at a TDMS weekend or emailing organizers you know of in your area to talk about common interests and concerns, we can all support each other in developing local thriving TDMS organizations throughout North America!