

2018 Dance Flurry - Dance Organizers Unite For Discussion - Year 3!

Facilitator + notes from: Emily Addison (EmilyLAddison@gmail.com)

Approximately 40 organizers from Canada and the US were in attendance at this year's workshop. The discussion focused on 'upping attendance'. This topic was selected ahead of time because, as part of last year's discussion, we identified everyone's top challenges/topics of interest and upping attendance was the most popular.

Five favourite resources:

Here are some resources shared as part of the session. These include a few VERY NEWLY announced resources!!!

1. The Country Dance and Song Society:
 - a. CDSS organizers page which is FULL of great resources <http://www.cdss.org/resources/how-to/organizers-resources>
 - b. Canadian organizers survey report released THIS WEEK! <https://www.cdss.org/cn-survey>
 - c. CDSS organizer e-blasts NEW INITIATIVE! Sign up here: <http://bit.ly/2sqQr4B>
 - d. CDSS News (magazine) <https://www.cdss.org/programs/cdss-news-publications/cdss-news>
 - e. For additional support, contact Linda Henry (CDSS Outreach Manager) at outreach@cdss.org
2. Shared Weight email discussion forum: <http://www.sharedweight.net/>
3. Facebook Organizers of Contra Dances : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/111126912393768/>
4. POTD 3 – dance organizers conference in Portland Maine Nov30-Dec2 www.puttinonthedance.org
5. Organize your own organizer discussion at a dance weekend – even a casual discussion over lunch ☺
******Participate in the CDSS US Organizers Survey by April 13th <http://bit.ly/2o46pw5>******

Who are you trying to attract... some considerations:

Emily provided a very brief overview of the following ideas. (They are flushed out a bit more here to make sense for reading.)

As organizers, we have a defined amount of time & energy to spend on upping our attendance. Thus, when choosing strategies, it's helpful to think about what will be the most successful yet use least amount of time/energy.

Where are your potential NEW dancers? → Are you looking for ANYONE or are you TARGETTING specific groups that may be more likely to enjoy your activity and your group? ... Your strategies may change depending on the audience.

If you want to target specific groups, here are just a few ideas to get started. (Full disclosure --- there is always some stereotyping when grouping people.) Think about

- Age/stage of life
 - kids & teens - What will attract them? What keeps them from coming/how can you help to overcome those barriers?
 - 20-somethings (university/college vs post-university) – often college students 'leave town' after their degree is done
 - 30-40 somethings – lots of variety here but many have kids so how cater to these folks as could be long-term dancers
 - 50-70s somethings – lots of variety but often newly retired with more time, empty nesters, some folks newly divorced
- Interests
 - Outdoor sports (canoe/hiking clubs) OR dance/active lessons in other forms (e.g., ballroom schools; yoga studios)
 - Folkies
 - Home schoolers
- People who are looking for community ☺
 - New to town/country
 - Single (maybe newly?)
 - Empty nesters
- Other???

Who are you trying to attract? → Would they be ATTRACTED by your publicity strategies/materials? Would they be interested in the VIBE of your event once they arrive? Consider...

1. Who will be attracted to your publicity?
 - Where is it located?
 - What medium in? (e.g., social media; flyers; etc)
 - What message is being conveyed through the words you use?
 - What message is being conveyed through the look/feel?
2. Who will be attracted to the 'vibe' of your event?
 - Dance experience? (e.g., Is the caller bossy? Is the music lively? Is there lots of support on the dance floor for beginners?)
 - Physical atmosphere? (e.g., How is the hall lighting? Too far to travel?)
 - Social tone? (e.g., Are regulars really welcoming in a social way to new people? Is everyone a particular age?)

Increasing attendance – ideas from the group!

The vast majority of the workshop time involved participants sharing their best ideas in small groups. Each group then selected their top three ideas and shared them with the whole group.

Note:

- The 'top three' ideas identified by each group are noted with an *.
- If more than one group shared a particular idea, that is noted. For example (3) means three different groups shared that idea. However, I didn't always group the ideas depending on how they were presented.
- Where possible, participants were asked to list organizations that have successfully used a particular idea in case others want to follow up with that group about how best to implement an idea.
- Also, participants were asked to provide key details that made a particular idea successful. In one hour, we didn't have enough time to really get into too many details... .. to be followed up via email as participants want!

1. Getting brand new people to come their first time:

- *Caller Lab Marketing Manual (<http://www.arts-dance.org/CALLERLAB%20Square%20Dance%20Marketing%20Manual.pdf>)
- *Meetup.com - one discussion group suggested using existing MU group (e.g., an outdoors club), not necessarily creating a new dedicated group (4) (worked well for Ottawa, Philadelphia, try Adirondack mountain climbing club)
- *Networking: home schoolers get phys ed credit, welcome the kids, parents responsible for kids, converse with parents ALSO music schools: kids who play fiddle join in playing, parents attend to listen to kids, fiddle camps
- Pics on Instagram + facebook to show people who have never been
- *College partnerships/tie ins: college sponsored or oriented, do a demo, connect to music/phys ed program (e.g., Amherst MA, Asheville NC, Warren Wilson, Bates, Fredonia) (2) ... note that CDSS has grants for fostering more youth involvement. How do you get colleges to cooperate? Need a student or teacher to get the space. Sign up for one course (e.g., a music course) and get to know the faculty – offer to do demo in music history course and show had music/dance go together. Find courses within dance/music. Fredonia professor in music has extra credit if go to one contra dance so they come for 1-2 dances but that's usually it. Also getting on college life-learning list (Rochester)
- Outreach in local schools, tie in with phys ed department for middle and high schools (2) (Belfast Flying Shoes has tonnes of kids/teenagers)
- Many high school students need volunteer hours – offer for them to do hours at dance weekend.
- Reduced admission more effective in w/a group (college etc) (New Haven CT)
- Social media +
- *Use regular dancers –bring friends after having a potluck or meal ... have their birthday party at the dance
- Word of mouth
- Free tickets subsidized by grants - 20% or ½ off second dance (Belfast Flying Shoes)
- **Take the dance to outside groups as a social activity (e.g., at a Yale alumni group event, the local Modern-Western group programmed 'barn dance' where they taught basic dancing + did a demo AND they gave anyone at that event a discount to the upcoming MW class... will try sports clubs like softball league next) // outreach event during a community event (2)
- Become part of a community health promotion (e.g., Rise Vermont)
- *Not only give first-timers their second dance free (or say \$5) but also give the regular who brought that new person (need to arrive with not just say 'came with') a discount on their next dance (coupon)... has worked well. If bring a friend, could have dinner before and get them familiar with that to expect over the evening, the regular dancer could set up their friend who is new with a few welcoming and supportive partners ... really care take the new person over the evening rather than simply inviting their friend and then abandoning them.
- 2-for-1 for new dancers or for a regular who brings a friend (have to arrive with) (2)
- *½ price next time for a regular dancer who brings a new person
- Press release – know how to write one
- Canadian Square and round Dance Society Pinterest page: boards, promo, press
- Community calendars – press/radio/tv
- *Try a new time slot – Sunday afternoon, Saturday night competing for participants' attention and bands/callers
- *Flash mob / demo
- Financial incentive for beginner workshop - \$5 not \$10 (Charlottesville)
- *Weekend – youth scholarships for under 30s attending first time (Adirondack Dance Weekend, sponsored by Flurry association)
- *Weekend - A-la-carte pricing (could be problem as some people who would attend the whole weekend might chose to not attend some parts)
- Weekend - Public Radio (VT)
- Weekend - Use umbrella arts org
- Weekend – For Flyers include QR Codes, websites, post around town
- Weekend – hard copy to other groups
- Weekend – themes of peace, love, contra

- Weekend – hospitality include housing for out-of-towners
- Weekend - PayPal advance ticket sales... people like to be able to take care of pay quickly
- Weekend – childcare for young families who otherwise find it very hard to attend
- CDSS grants for new initiatives, especially around youth
- Cross-posting events / partnerships
- *Have a list of all media outlets so when have things to send out, just go through the list.
- *Use a larger arts umbrella organizations that is local to the area to help with advertising

2. Getting first-timers to come back a second time AND THEN to make the dancing something that they regularly do... 'a habit':

- *Follow up important – personal email, sign up at door when paying (ask if on the mailing list), personal phone call /// offer a discount (\$5) for next time come if give address first time + also do a follow up (unsure if allowed to 'buy' email address in Canada...maybe think of it as a coupon?) (2)
- On next dance free card, have a place for comments (e.g., if something liked, tell us and we'll do more of if... if there's something you didn't like tell us too... if not something to say, get email). (Rochester)
- Social event after – invite from mic AND invite your neighbour
- *Greeter/wecolmer for new people at the door – answering questions, friendliness (3)
- *Make connections at the break (keep new dancers past break) – on mic, "stick around after the break"... structure for mingling, flag friendly regulars
- Flag new dancers with happy face sticker so regulars can seek them out (Ottawa)
- Food at break – consistently high quality, great for college students?
- *Promote a safe dance environment. Need an effective policy. Have signs in bathroom. (no creepers!)
- *If have a beginners event, give regulars who participate in lesson a reduced price. Helps people who are struggling financially another way to participate in the dancing. Also helps the beginners have more support at that event.
- Short question/answer during the break
- 2nd dance free coupon OR next dance coupon - one group said 'mixed results', date cards so know when out (4)
- Sign in book – print email and we'll let you know when the next dance is ... then sends a follow up email 'hey glad came, hope had great time, something liked please share it, something made uncomfortable please share that too' also could add column on how heard about the dance so have feedback.
- Gender neutral roles??? (Lead/follow)
- *Comfort with eye contact? – hour long beginner lesson (e.g., Glen Echo – youtube video) include a good pep talk that covers details like eye contact.
- Have good videos
- Have a handout for beginners because there's so much to take in, it's hard to absorb your first time (Ottawa)
- *Survey
- *Send packets of flyers to libraries – they will distribute among branches (leverage non-profit stats)
- Welcoming atmosphere- personal attention to newbies
- Dance angels

3. Engaging/Motivating regular – *bring new people*? make it a habit? volunteer?

See #1&2 as there are some ideas up there that relate.

- *special weekend events (e.g., potlucks)
- Pics of other events with the same band, groupies come to all the dances
- memberships – reinforce community
- *Motivate experienced dancers at an easy level dance that their skill building challenge isn't floor level dancing but in building a community (has worked at Virginia tech)... encourage local dancers to come to that. The university includes money so students in free, non-students pay and then that money is used for other local dances.
- Weekend - Anniversary Dance (Rochester)
- *Provide child care --- e.g., hire someone; incorporate the kids in ('have lots of grammas') (3)

Other comments:

Squared for pay at the door. Minor fee of 2.75%.

Membership allows organizations to have an advanced flow of funds for hall rental, insurance etc.

Emily little extra note: It was interesting that a lot of the ideas that were shared focused on the promotional side of things and not much on the vibe. In Ottawa, we get about 15 brand new people every dance → if only we could convert more of them to regulars. I keep wondering what it is about the experience that doesn't grab new folks (knowing full well that there's lots of other pressures/draws in life too). I'd love to talk more about what it is about our dance activities that are turn-offs/challenges for brand new people and how to help address those.