

CDSS Maps Future Direction at Annual Board Meeting

by JoLaine Jones-Pokorney



Closing song with Board and staff during the Annual meeting (photo by Nikki Herbst)

The 23 members of the CDSS Governing Board met at the headquarters in Easthampton, MA for our annual meeting on April 10-12. Traditionally, the annual meeting takes place on the three days prior to NEFFA (New England Folk Festival), and several of us stayed afterwards to share the joy of dance, music, and song at the festival.

Our Board meetings are a lot of work, but they're also joyous occasions, with some folks leading songs, others calling or playing for dances in our meeting space. Wednesday evening after our meeting, several of us went to Hampshire College to dance and call at "The Red Barn," a student-led contra dance on campus. Thursday evening our board, plus folks who were hosting us in their homes, met at an Air BnB shared by several of the board members for food and fellowship.

The Governing Board welcomed new members Karl Colon (Yellow Springs, OH), Robbin Marcus (Lithonia, GA), Diane Silver (Asheville, NC), Darlene Underwood (Cincinnati, OH), and Juliette Webb (Nashville, TN). Each of our new Board members brings a unique and passionate voice to the table.

New for last year, and further developed this year, was training for our new Board members. Three video conference sessions were held in the months prior to the Annual Meeting, so that we could make the most out of our time together. This year's new Board members were

ready to jump in and contribute on the very first day. Dorcas Hand and Pam Paulson led the team that put together training on governance, finances, and a glimpse of the committees and their tasks. Each new board member was assigned a "board buddy," someone on the board to whom they could turn with questions about training, preparing or logistics for their first Annual Meeting.

To kick off the meeting, Executive Director Katy German presented her inspiring vision for CDSS. Rooted in the Strategic Plan, Katy called for us all to think about CDSS not as an independent and autonomous entity but as the center of an interconnected network of people and communities. Using the analogy of a colony of mushrooms — connected, spreading, nurtured by each other — she talked about each mushroom (community) having a base of support (people and process) and colorful and spreading caps (outreach and programming). To grow CDSS and help more people find our dance, music, and song traditions, we must invest in and support all the mushrooms in our colony. One mushroom can only grow and extend so far. A whole colony of mushrooms can reach so much farther! Over the next 5 years, CDSS will work to grow a network of partners who are resourced and ready to work collectively to increase our impact in the world. Developing our network will also provide a foundation for future cross-sector collaborations as CDSS reaches out to education, health, and humanities organizations to develop local-level initiatives. This vision

energized us all, and the mushroom analogy popped up all weekend long.

An important ongoing discussion is how the staff and Board can best work together, each responsible for carrying forward the Strategic Plan and creating success. Since the adoption of the Strategic Plan, the Board and staff have created three new task groups dedicated to work in three of the Focus Areas: Stewarding Living Traditions (The Archives Task Group), Reaching School Aged Participants, and Robust Camp Programs. We foresee a lot of exciting work coming out of these groups over the next few years!

Also, important for Board members is a willingness to share CDSS's mission and vision with others as we work to build a culture of philanthropy, a pay-it-forward outlook, within our board and in our membership. Discussing the role money plays in organizational growth can be uncomfortable, but the board understands that smart growth requires a solid foundation. Many organizations seek out board members with deep pockets. But we believe there has to be a balance of skill, wisdom, and representation. We value our board members who have skills, enthusiasm, and dedication to the mission, and if they also have the ability give that's a bonus. The most important factor is belief in — and promotion of — the CDSS mission and vision. And while not all of our Board members can give large sums of money, we can all give something. During the annual appeal at the end of 2018, 100% of Board members made a donation to CDSS. Throughout the year we all work in teams to create opportunities to share CDSS's vision and invite more people to be involved. In the past year, many of our members and Affiliates participated in fundraising events



CDSS Affiliate mapping exercise at Annual Board Meeting (photo by Nikki Herbst)

— dances, game nights, auctions, donations in someone's honor or memory, gift memberships for weddings, births, or anniversaries. People became members, renewed their memberships, gave a donation, and updated their estate plans to include CDSS. Each and every conversation, connection, and donation strengthens our mushroom network!

We know that so many members believe as we do in the transformative power of dancing, singing, and making music together. Like us, many believe that the world needs more of what we have to offer, and what organization is better positioned to make a broad impact? One recent major donor commented that they give to CDSS because they believe "CDSS is the one organization poised to do the most good in the country at this time." There has never been a greater need for healing and community.



"We spend endless hours conspiring to make sure that the deepest of human traditions — being completely present with one another as we sing and dance — does not become a casualty of the virtual world."

~ CDSS New Board Member Karl Colon



Amen to that! It's why we on the board are willing to travel for meetings, hold virtual meetings in between, spread the word, and give generously. In a time of division and polarization, coming together in participatory arts strengthens the bonds that unite us.

Another important way that CDSS is creating a strong foundation for our mushroom network is through Salesforce, a customer relationship management database that will increase our capability and efficiency tremendously. Members got a glimpse of it when the "CDSS Commons" was released, allowing for quick and easy member renewals, camp registrations, and best of all, a searchable member directory. But as we move our business over, Salesforce will improve productivity, allow us to explore more creative and modern approaches to fundraising and member engagement, improve customer service, and provide powerful analytical data to help us better support our Affiliates and members.

We hope to see you this year as we travel to new communities, or perhaps [this summer at camp!](#) The camp may only last one week, but the community lasts a lifetime.