

## Flurry Festival 2020 – Dance Organizers Discussion

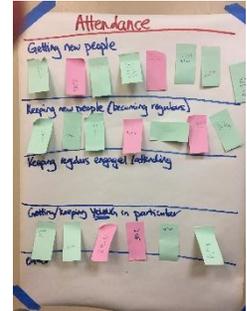
**Facilitator:** Emily Addison

**About the participants and session:** Approximately 16 organizers participated in the session. We began by getting a sense of topics that are currently of interest to those present and then we focused the rest of the session on sharing our best practices/ideas. The conversation was rich and so many great ideas were shared. Read on!

### **Getting a Sense of Topics of Interest:**

We took approximately 10 minutes to identify topics of interest AND those that are strengths for our local community. Here is an example of the topic sheets posted around the room:→

- Green = challenges with/interested in learning about this topic (session participants could put up to 3 green stickers)
- Red = Have information from my dance that I can share about this topic



Possible topics of interest to organizers.	# of organizers Top challenge OR want to learn more	# of organizers Know about / can share
<b>Attendance</b>		
Getting new people	6	2
Keeping new people (becoming regulars)	5	2
Keeping regulars engaged/attending		
Getting/keeping YOUNG in particular	4	2
Other		
<b>Organizers &amp; Volunteers</b>		
More people / skills for leadership roles	1	
Getting more day-of volunteers (e.g., set up; door)	3	
How to manage day-of volunteers	1	1
Personality issues among organizers	1	1
Other		
<b>Finances (NOT relating to attendance or talent)</b>		
Door admission		2
Other Sources of revenue	2	2
Expenses		
Other		
<b>Talent &amp; Sound</b>		
Not enough talent AND/OR how to develop talent		1
Talent Quality AND/OR how to provide feedback		
\$\$ for talent	2	1
Communication w talent (expectations etc.)		2
Other	1	
<b>Other Topics</b>		
Role Terminology		
Community safety (e.g., consent; codes of conduct)		3
Welcoming community + community practices		2
Happening' & fun vibe	2	3
Venue	2	
Starting a brand-new series	2	
Other		

## Sharing Best Practices & Ideas:

Note – Emily grouped the comments by topic for ease of reading. Our conversation was much more organic. 😊

### 1. How to get and keep new dancers:

- **How advertise:**
  - David: Build relationship with local entertainment newspaper. Send in a press release with a new picture every month. Gets published every time. The entertainment editors of all papers are looking for content. There might be competition so need to give something of quality.
  - David: Talk to various focus/interest groups like Kiwanis as they look for social outings. Talk to their activities chair about bringing their group to the dance.
  - David: Approach the public radio station as they make community announcements.
- **How to sell dance (in press releases, posters, etc.)**
  - David: Many people remember dancing in a negative way from childhood so sell the benefits rather than the concept. Build awareness of it, how fun it is, how everyone can do it. So they can go from curiosity stage to the trial stage. 'I'm aware of this – I'm willing to put myself out and try this'.
  - David: Not selling the stake, you're selling the sizzle!
  - Joe: Make a poster "What's a contra dance" "730 Friday" with a photo. That's it. (Em not sure if heard this right??). Hook interest. Plus chose a photo that moves, has emotion, doesn't tell you anything about what's happening.
  - Emily: Kind of like Ants Pants Contra dance
  - Diane: Indescribable. Joy – come on out!
- **Images/Photos that attract/sell to new people?**
  - David: People in your community want to have fun so show people having fun! That's the sizzle. 😊
  - David: A really cool skirt, a college kid really having fun.
  - David: Newspapers want to put images out that make their publication look attractive.
  - Emily/Diane: Consider photos that show the type of people you're trying to attract (e.g., display range of diversity)... send different photos to different mediums.
- **Importance of door admissions people & dance hosts:**
  - David: So vital to building your community, as much or more so than what happens on the dance floor! David attended a dance elsewhere and the door person didn't even make eye contact ... didn't feel good.
  - David: At the door do a bit of data mining, asking each person how heard about us, what brought you here. Partner up with an experienced dancer. Also get name, email, and find out if on FB and Instagram.
  - David: David doesn't dance... he's welcoming people, working the room, taking lots of pictures, etc. Notices new people out – check out 'any problems out there?' 'What do you think of this?' If don't engage with them, they will think of the experience as just an episodic moment like going to the Escape Room or Putt Putt Golf. We're trying to convince people to put our event at the highest priority of interests.
  - Diane: She brought up with her Board how David Wiley acts as a host/welcomer. He's not taking the money at the desk, he's welcoming and hosting. Their Board takes turns at being the host but really, they are acting as the dance manger and there's a real difference there. It's a big ask to ask people to volunteer and NOT dance. Maybe they get in free next week?
- **Have ways for beginners to self-identify:**
  - ????: We have 'I'm learning buttons' at the table.
  - Ottawa: We have bright smiling face stickers. We were good at welcoming people before, but now way better. The stickers really stand out and it's a cue for our regular dancers. The stickers are optional, and some beginners want to be clearly identified.
  - Lisa: Our people see the beads, but they don't get danced with.
- **Engaging younger dancers, especially when have very few:**
  - Lisa: We're not going to get 20-somethings. But get the 40s, 35s. (Shared laughter and agreement on working down in age.)
  - Joe: Monday Night Concord targeted to young people. Identified 2-3 key young folks (watching who were social influences/movers) and told them that they get in free for every dance they bring five friends to (didn't publicize this). This was very successful!

- Joe: Young people want to dance with young people, they may not mind dancing with older but want to have young. Concord Mondays allowed to have a younger set as long as welcome others.... got out of control as too long and became less inclusive.
- Patty: Find the hottest, youngest band you can.
- Diane: Involve the young people in decision making, although not necessarily work as they are busy. But give them a voice on something that matters to them (invite to booking committee).
- Joe: Whoever making rules on what allowed/not, include young people.
- Emily: Ottawa holds two dances a year for under 30 and really promote those at the universities. Get a larger group and they see others their age.
- Paul: Attract outing clubs. They either come as 20+ people or zero... great boost.
- **Other promotional/attendance ideas:**
  - David: Jonesborough and Portland Intown take video at each dance and post it, showing a great time.
  - Gwyn: My events sell out but I still advertise like crazy.
  - Lisa: Advertise our events as a dance party rather than just a dance.
  - Peter?: For first time dances, in exchange for email will get a second time free card. And encourage them to bring a friend. People don't have a problem giving their email when hear dance free.
  - Gwyn: Group started advertising 'bring two friends'... they don't have to dance, just come and check out. Seems successful. No incentive to bring the friends... just bring.
  - Emily: Ottawa has given members two free passes to bring friends, but doesn't seem to bring many in.
  - Peter: Google ad words: If 501c3, Google will give \$10K a month in google advertising. The 'dark underbelly' is need to have 5% click rate. They haven't done it yet because intimidated by the amount of work to monitor and tweak it to keep at 5%. Massive opportunity depends on how craft the ads.
  - Diane: Don't want to sound desperate. That doesn't sound like a happening vibe. All about attitude.
  - Joe: Can't provide all the products for all the people. Some dances in his area failed as were trying to meet all interests. Need to know who you are targeting at. It can be relatively large group if their needs/interest are similar. What are they after?
  - Joe: Problem isn't usually getting new people, it's keeping them. They stay because they like it for a specific set of reasons.
  - Joe: Need to use different platforms for different ages (e.g., under 25 is Instagram). Find someone in each of those categories to do email, Facebook, Instagram. And you need to tweak the messaging for the different platforms.

## 2. Building a fun & welcoming community

*NOTE: Some of this is also addressed in other sections... look through!*

- ????: They have a successful social event where go to a lake and swim, then do a dance in a pavilion.
- ????: During announcements, encourage people to check folks sitting down.
- ????: Watch for people who are turning off dancers, take action.
- Roy: If have a label maker, can make a name immediately.
- Paul: Everyone at a community dance is on the same playing feel as they are all easy dances for parties. The whole nature is that it's always fun, something different.
- David: They give out Klondike bars at the break. People just love it. Even made t-shirts that say "I contra danced for a Klondike Bar in Jonesborough, TN". It's all part of branding your community. (Emily notes that is also goes to happening and fun vibe!)
- **Themed dances**
  - David: Anything that you can layer on to your dance is great. They hold theme dances that really bring people out who haven't been for a while. Both Roaring 20s and Medieval dress-up dances were super popular. (David surprised by the Medieval!). Take a group picture just before the break as folks love having their pictures taken. March 3 national pound cake day. Have a competition. Also do cupcake contest (20 people participated!)
  - Emily: People love it when the dance has a special feel. Ottawa does several special events throughout the year (St. Patrick's green dress up; end-of-year dessert potluck at the break)

### 3. Volunteers:

- David: Most people are coming for the dancing. David feels that because he works so hard on building community, when he approaches someone to take on a volunteer role, they are always willing.
- Joe: If need volunteers, make a direct ask to individuals. Then becomes a bit of a social network if volunteers not working alone.  
Emily: Can create sense of belonging, build friendships.
- Joe: Volunteering is part of your community vibe. If you make announcements, that's not community building. Put flyers out and talk to people directly.
- Joe: If something involves decision, often good to let the volunteers make the decisions.
- Emily: Pointed out that Ottawa has had a few instances where there was conflict among volunteers when one volunteer telling another what they were doing wrong.
- Diane: At each dance, announce that an all-volunteer organization, and specifically thank those volunteering that night. They get a little glory and it models volunteering for everyone else. It's the opposite to saying 'we really need volunteers'.

### 4. Fundraising:

- Lisa: Appeal to people's self-interest. We had a big event so needed to raise money. We said 'this dance is going to die/go away unless we raise enough money'.... NOT 'please help us'. They had to raise \$10,000 and they achieved it!
  - Explain why need the help.
  - If donate \$70, get a boot bag (cost about \$1 to make). Like the sneetches. It worked well!
  - Had Louisiana Tourism Board donate hotel rooms and a few other things (not travel costs) and then held a raffle. Although the dance group doesn't usually do raffles, the big raffle worked well.
- Joe: Have to let people know what your need is. If don't specify, individuals can end up donating only a little bit when could sometimes donate much more if only knew the need.
- Joe: CDSS Webchat online – fantastic ideas. ([www.cdss.org/webchats](http://www.cdss.org/webchats))
- Patty: They do a fundraising dance each year to maintain/improve their hall. They ask about 10 people to make a sizable donation (\$100-500). Then start with \$2000 and ask community to match that. At that evening, most is cash donations, selling snacks, selling plants. Over that evening, raise \$4000 for the year. (Could use similar approach for fundraising for other items.)

### 5. Other ideas:

- Joe: For campus dance, not allowed to charge admission on campus or university charges a lot for the room. They get \$25/student/year in dues (\$1-2,000 a year). So need to let know what it takes to put a dance on. BIDA and a few others put up posters (X to hire caller, Y for band, etc... so will cost Z put on dance. So need approximately Q per person.) Pay what can. And if you can pay more, please do because some can't. AND we need your help.