

How to structure your organization

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There are many models for how to organize dance and music events and how to structure sponsoring organizations. This page discusses some possibilities, especially those most feasible for people starting new events.

ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

- **Individual:** Many successful events are organized by individuals, either working entirely by themselves or along with a group of volunteers. If you are psyched about having an event but no one else where you live has even heard of what you're trying to organize, consider starting something on your own. If it goes well and other people start to get excited, harness their enthusiasm by drawing them into some sort of volunteer or organizational role. Keep in mind that organizing recurring (monthly, weekly) events all by yourself can be a recipe for burnout. Think about developing a sustainable organization that will still be around 5, 10, 20 years down the road.
- **Band/Musician/Caller:** In some areas it is common for an event to be run by a caller, musician, or a band who also performs regularly (or always) for the event. A house band or caller can give a nice consistency to an event, and the income from the regular gig is a good incentive for the organizers/performers to put in the logistical work. Sometimes one musician runs a series, inviting other guests to join them in rotating combinations each week/month. This can be the best of both worlds — consistency and variation. If your event is the only one of its type in the area, you might consider opening up the schedule to other performers as a way to draw more people — friends, fans, admirers — into the scene. If you are a performer who lives in an area with lots of famous bands and callers, consider starting your own event as a way to establish yourself in the community and get your name out there.
- **Committee:** The majority of traditional dance and music events in the US and Canada are organized by committees that may include some combination of dancers, teachers, callers, musicians, sound technicians, etc. Some such groups are CDSS affiliates and/or not-for-profit entities (see below). Organizing committees may range in size from 2 to 20 or more people, depending on the scope of the group, the range of types of events it sponsors, and the specific roles that need to be filled. Many committees divide up tasks, assigning jobs such as band booking, caller booking, publicity, finances, web design, coordinating volunteers, etc. to different people. If a group puts on several types of events (e.g. an English dance, a Morris ale, and a contra dance weekend) there may be sub-committees for each event.

If you are looking to create a committee, think about asking people who have demonstrated an interest in being involved in your group or event - people who have volunteered regularly, performers, avid participants, etc. Ask a small number of them to join you as organizers. If you are looking to expand a committee, come up with a policy about how you ask people to become committee members and how you will decide who to ask. An involved discussion of committee decision-making models is beyond the scope of this document (thank goodness). A quick tip: the larger the committee, the more cumbersome decision making becomes. Consider keeping your organizational committee on the smaller side, and recruiting volunteers to help with specific tasks - especially those that occur at the event itself - as necessary. Also, consider creating a simple agreement or set of bylaws that describe how you will make decisions together, and then stick to it.

OTHER NOTES

Volunteers: Volunteers can be absolutely invaluable in running an event regardless of how your organization is structured. I consider volunteers to be different from organizers. Organizers are the ultimate decision makers - they craft the vision and direction for events and groups and they handle the ongoing work that is needed to make things happen; volunteers help out with specific tasks, such as setup and cleanup, sitting at the door taking money, distributing posters, sweeping the floor, etc. I strongly encourage every dance or music organization to develop a group of volunteers to help out with these sorts of tasks. An event can feel like it runs itself with enough volunteers handling specific jobs. Volunteers feel a sense of ownership of the event. Involving young people or new people as volunteers

is a good way to get them invested in the community and vet them for eventual involvement as organizers. If your event is searching for ways to get more young people involved, consider recruiting a few younger people who already attend and making them publicity volunteers in charge of getting more people their age to come to the event. At the events I organize volunteers are usually compensated with free or reduced admission. This is a great way to allow people with low or fixed incomes to attend regularly.

Organizational politics: It is important for all the organizers to be more or less on the same page (or at least to speak with one voice) about the identity of the event or series. A lot of dance and music organizations and committees struggle with conflicting ideas about the goals for the events they organize. That's sort of the nature of collaboration and group decision making, but it is important not to allow the politics within your committee to seep out into the broader community. As a performer it can be very frustrating to get mixed messages from an organizing committee. A sense of organizational conflict can be a deterrent to participation in your community, especially to newcomers. Do what you need to do to work things out within your committee, and then do your best to convey a sense of joy and excitement to your audience.

Vision: It is important for organizers to have a vision for their event and put that vision into practice by informing performers, attendees and the general public about their goals. A detailed discussion of creating a vision for your group can be found [here](#).

CDSS Affiliate Status: Whatever your group structure, you can become an affiliate organization of CDSS. Affiliate membership in CDSS connects you with groups and individuals all over the continent who sponsor and participate in similar events, and offers a number of other benefits. CDSS also offers insurance for groups for individual or recurring events. For more info see the CDSS [Become a Group Affiliate](#) page.

Non-profit organization: Many groups become non-profit entities (a state level designation) or tax-exempt entities (a federal designation) for financial reasons. To learn more about these two designations, contact CDSS, visit your state government web site, or the IRS web site. In most cases you will need to have some legal status for your group (such as non-profit designation) in order to have a bank account for the organization.