



Generational transition survey: Key findings and opportunities

Originally presented in an online
town hall May 22, 2024

[Watch the recording here](#)



Photo by Doug Plummer.

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Problem statement & objectives

CDSS Membership among 18-44 year olds is low

CDSS did not have a clear understanding of membership differences by age.

In 2023, CDSS decided to address the dissimilarities in membership and engagement for ages 18-44.



Photo by Avia Moore.

Two key goals

Understand the membership gap

Explore possible reasons for the membership gap in the 18-44 year old demographic, particularly amongst highly-engaged individuals and community leaders.

Explore this age demographics' needs

Gather insights regarding the needs and sentiments of 18-44 year olds engaged in folk communities that CDSS serves.

Out of scope:

- Complete 'census' of all 18-44 year olds
- Pitch membership to respondents

This knowledge will serve as *one of a number of inputs for CDSS* to consider in providing resources and programs that address the needs of this age demographic.

It will help CDSS support individuals and communities trying to engage younger participants and leaders.

Survey timeline & methodology

Online survey approach

Format

Ten minute anonymous Google Forms survey for people ages 18-44 with connection to a community within the CDSS scope*.



Distributed flyer with QR code

Distribution

The survey was fielded for four weeks in October 2023 and distributed via:

- CDSS email list (3 ebasts)
- CDSS Instagram and Facebook posts (reposting encouraged)
- Printed flyers at events
- Word-of-mouth promotion (eg 'snowball sampling').

Thank you again to all who helped distribute this survey!

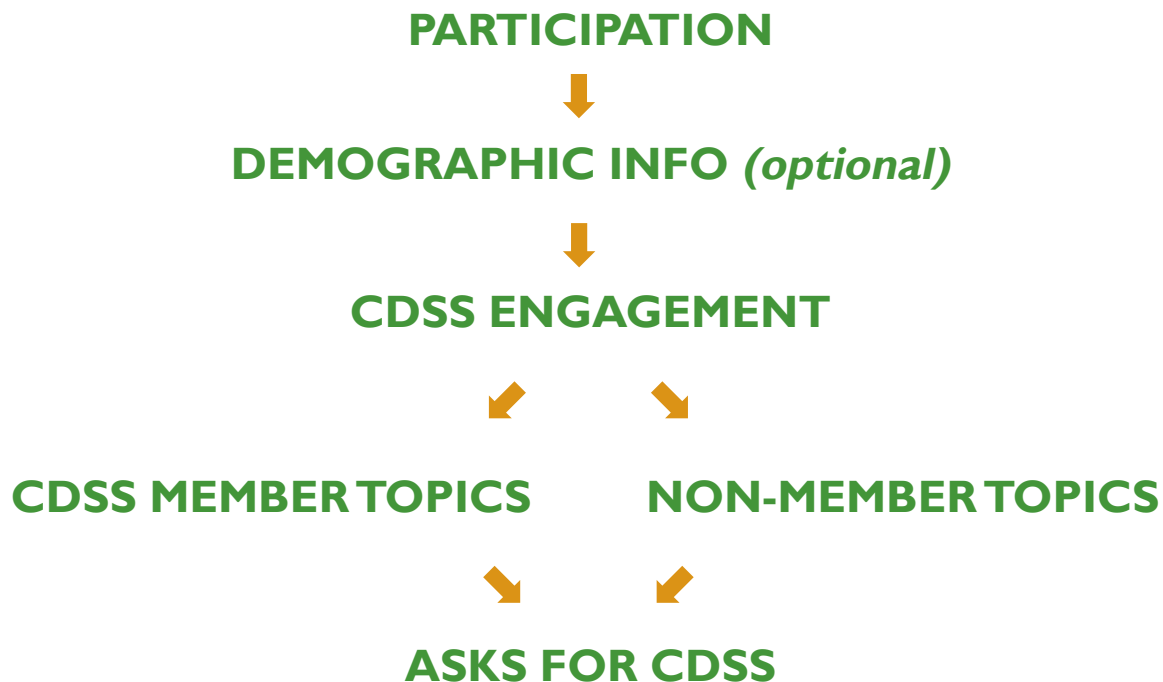
Analysis

All responses were checked for quality and completeness.

Overall, 829 individual responses were included in analysis.

*CDSS scope: Contra dance, English country dance, morris and sword dance, square dance, and the music supporting these traditions

Respondents answered different questions based on their reported membership status



Survey considerations & limitations

Sampling biases

Responses were likely skewed towards those with an online connection to CDSS and/or affiliates.

Despite efforts to reach as broadly as possible, this survey likely missed many without online or personal connections.

Feedback from the 45+ community

CDSS received many communications from those 45+ who felt excluded from this survey.

CDSS welcomed feedback from these individuals and is considering additional avenues for engagement.



Photo by Corey Walters.

Survey results

Demographics & folk activity participation

CDSS sentiment & membership

Asks for CDSS

Quick snapshot of the 829 survey respondents



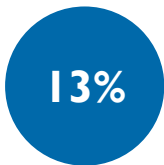
PARENTS

Overall, 21% of respondents identified as parents. 18% reported parenting children under 12, and 4% children ages 12-18.



STUDENTS

Of these 15%, 10% were full-time students and 5% were part-time students.



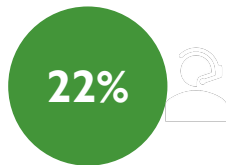
**PERSON W/
DISABILITIES**

Unspecified self-report.



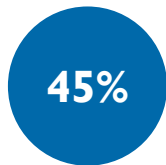
BIPOC

BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color



**COVID-
CAUTIOUS**

And/or immunocompromised.



**QUEER/
TRANS**

In a separate question about gender, 54% identified as cis women, 20% as cis men, and 13% as non-binary.

N=820 [Optional] Which most closely describes your gender? Please select all that apply:
N=780 [Optional] Please select all that you identify as:
N=825 Which of the following describe you? Please select all that apply:



Contra dance was the most commonly reported folk activity within CDSS scope

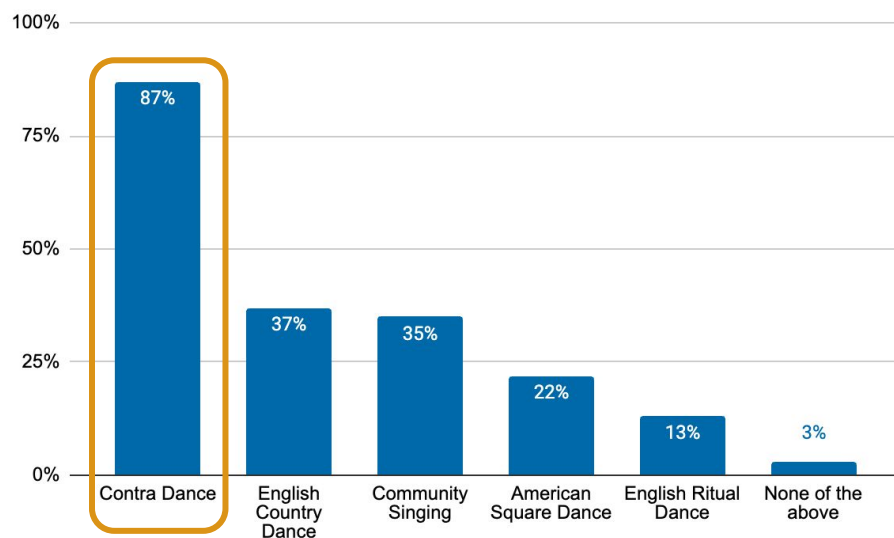
Contra the most common activity

With **87%** reporting participating in this dance form. English country dance (ECD) and singing were next most common, at **37%** and **35%**.

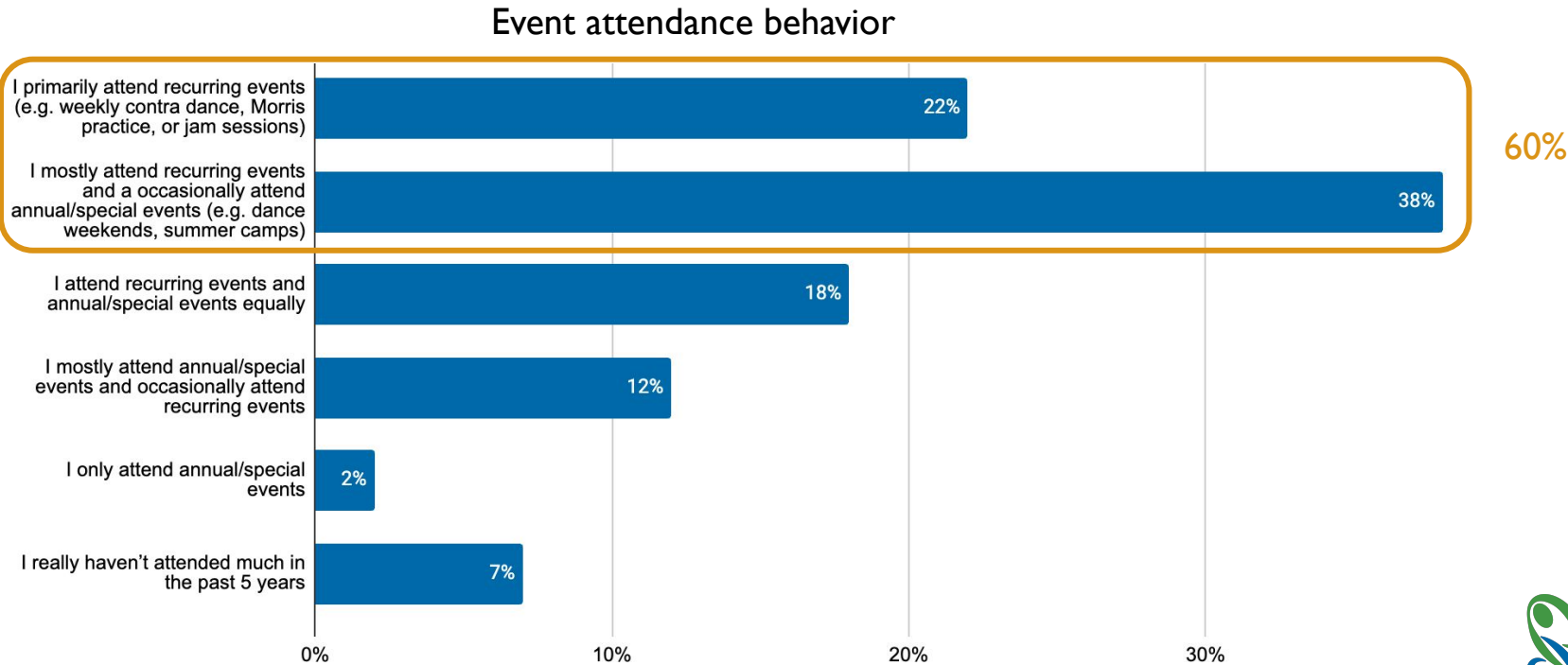
Fusion and swing also popular

Outside of the CDSS scope, respondents reported dancing fusion, east and west coast swing, balfolk, Scottish, and participating in jam sessions as the most common additional dance and music activities they participated in.

Folk music and dance form participation



Over half of respondents primarily or mostly attended recurring events across folk activities



N=829 Which of the following best describes your participation in folk activities?



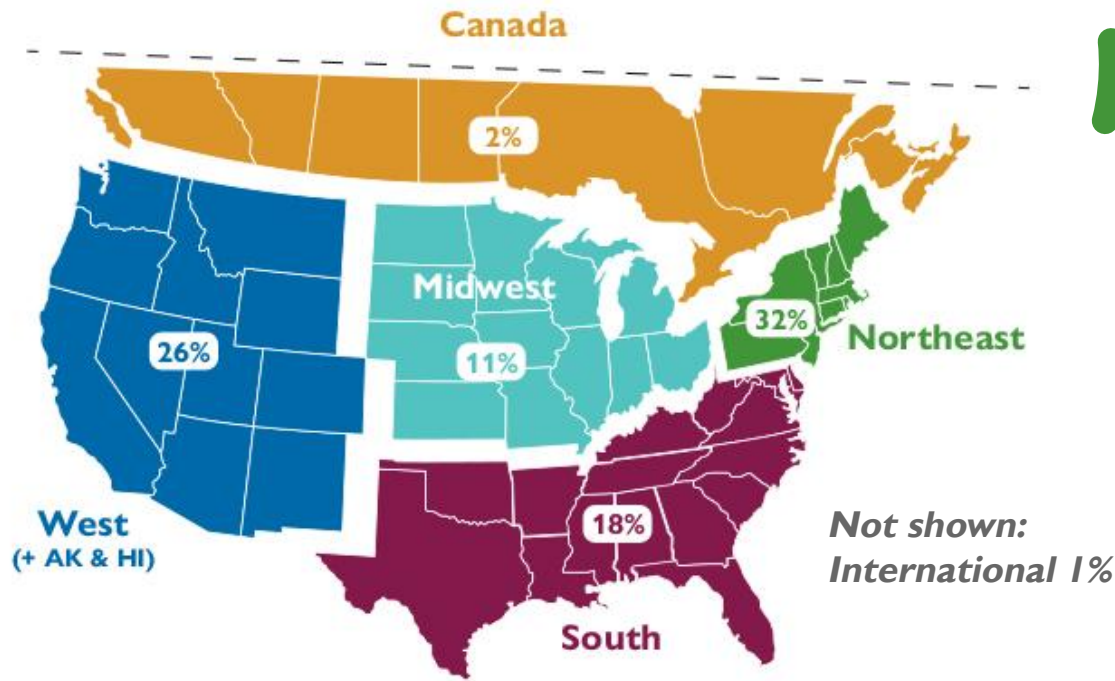
Respondents came from folk communities across the US

Northeast and west most common regions

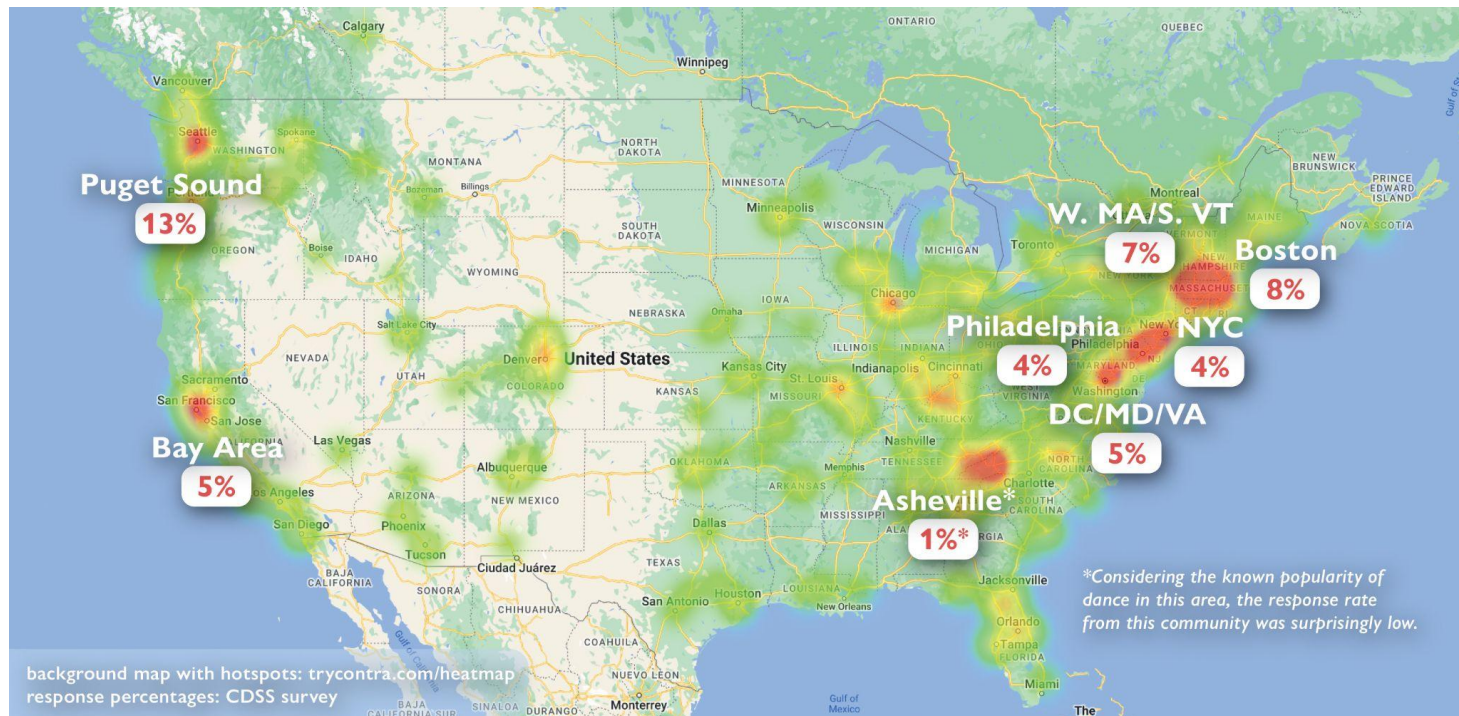
With **32%** and **26%** of responses, respectively.

Not everyone had a 'home' community

One-tenth (**10%**) of respondents reported not having a home folk community, or that their situation was complicated in some way.



The eight most common folk community 'hubs' roughly mapped to contra dance event density



N=829 Where do you consider your primary folk community to be (city, state/province)?

Note: If you don't identify with a specific folk community or it's complicated, type "NA: city, state/province - or NA: [short explanation]."

Half of respondents engaged in at least one leadership role, with nearly a third as volunteers

Overall, 51% were leaders

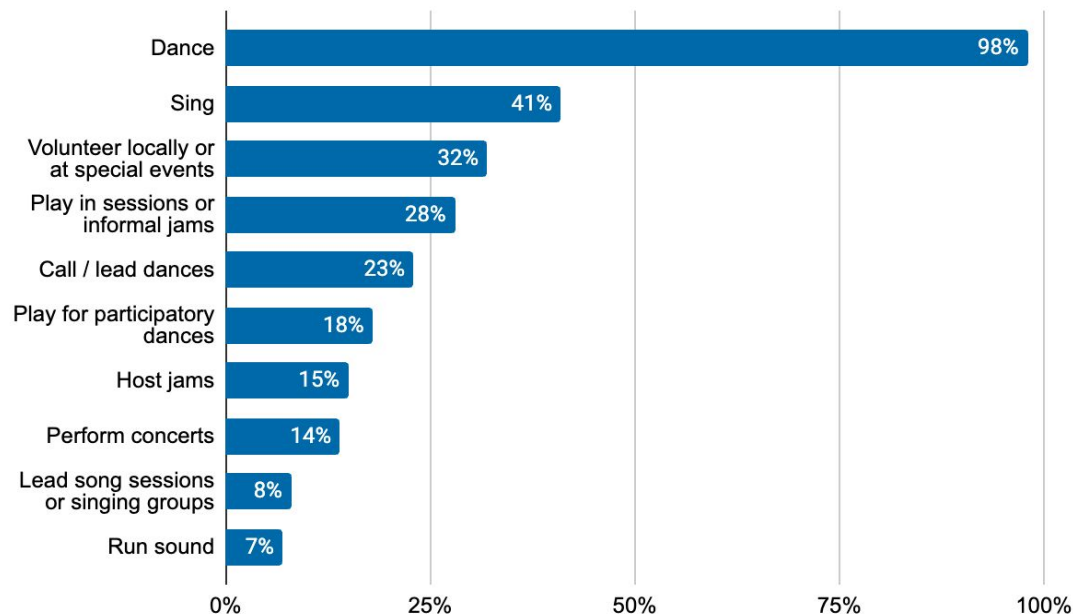
With 'leader' defined as 'musician, caller, leader, sound engineer, organizer, etc.'

A quarter earned income from leading folk activities

One quarter (25%) reported earning income from leading folk activities.

Of those who earned any income, 76% relied primarily on other income sources, but 24% (6% of *all* respondents) were either fully or mostly reliant on this income.

Engagement with folk activities



N=829 How do you participate in your folk activities? Please select all that apply:

N=829 If you serve in any leadership role (musician, caller, leader, sound engineer, organizer, etc.), which of the following best describes you?

N=829 Do you earn any income from folk activities (e.g. as a musician, caller, or sound engineer)? Please select the option that best describes your current situation.

Survey results

Demographics & folk activity participation

CDSS sentiment & membership

Asks for CDSS

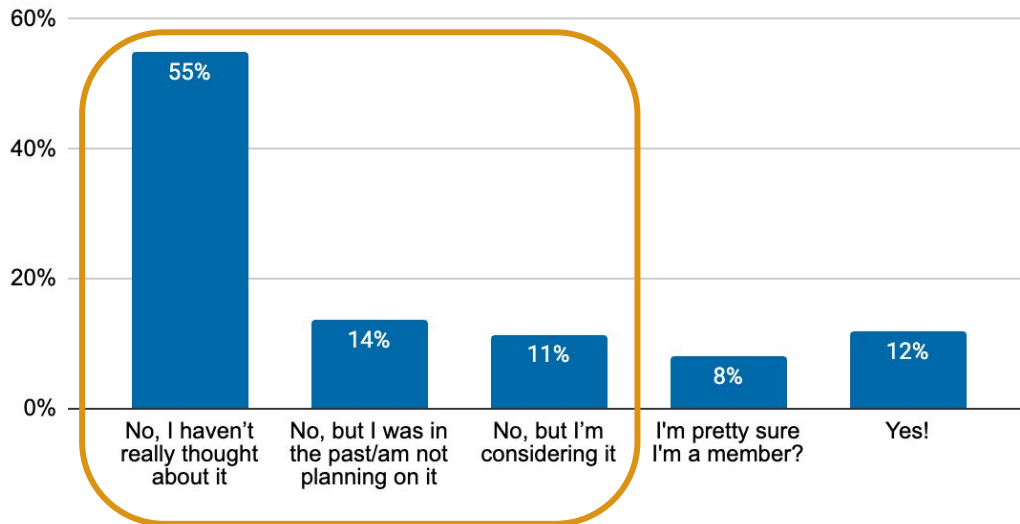
The large majority were not members of CDSS and membership was not on their radar

Overall, 80% of respondents were not CDSS members

For **55%** of respondents, membership was not something they had considered.

A subset of respondents reported being former members (**14%**) or were considering membership (**11%**).

Self-reported CDSS membership status



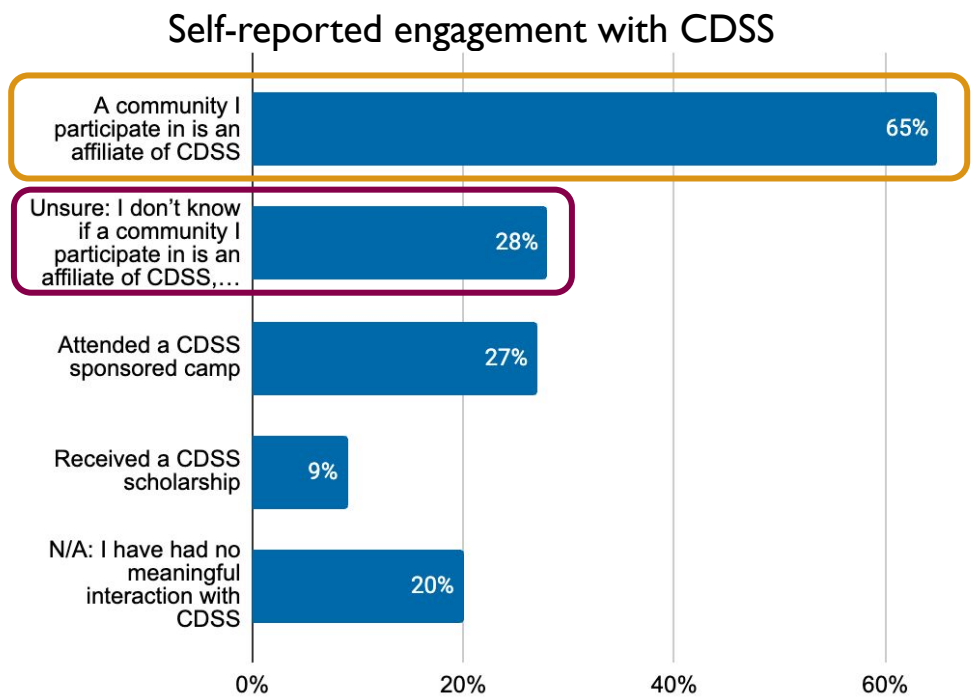
80% non-members

CDSS engagement without membership common, but some were unsure if CDSS was involved

CDSS affiliate community involvement

Two thirds (**65%**) reported participating in communities or events that they believed were affiliates of CDSS.

However, **28%** were unsure if their communities or events had CDSS connection.



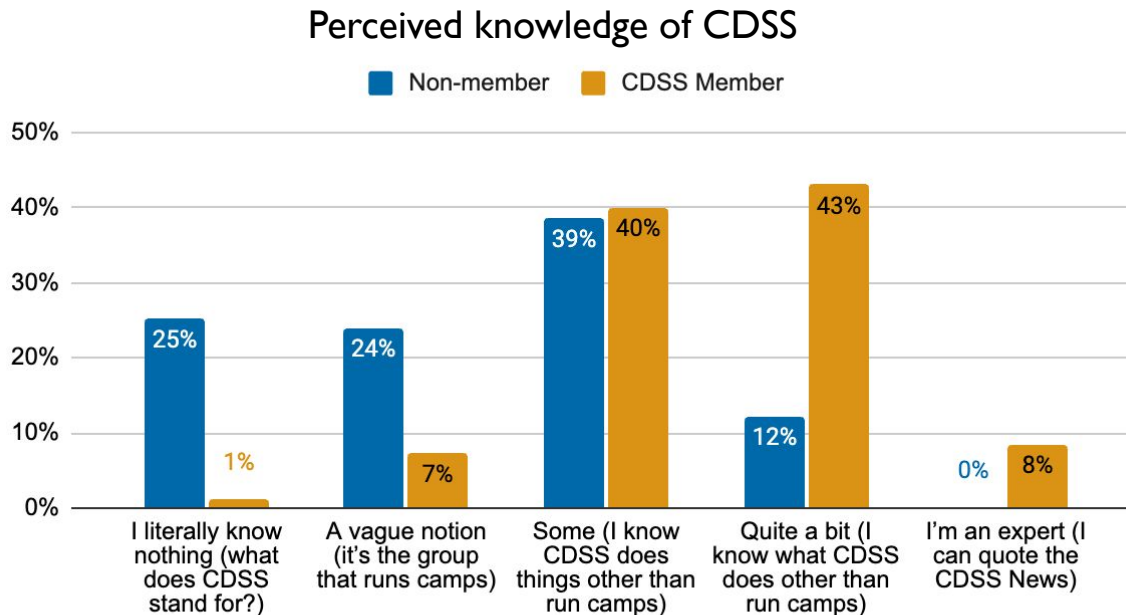
Regardless of membership status, many respondents were unaware of what CDSS does

Members reported higher knowledge of CDSS programming

Unsurprisingly, more members reported they 'knew quite a bit' about CDSS (**43%**) as opposed to non-members (**12%**).

Very few CDSS experts

Only **8%**, all members, claimed to be CDSS experts. Overall, **26%** of respondents claimed to 'literally know nothing' about CDSS.



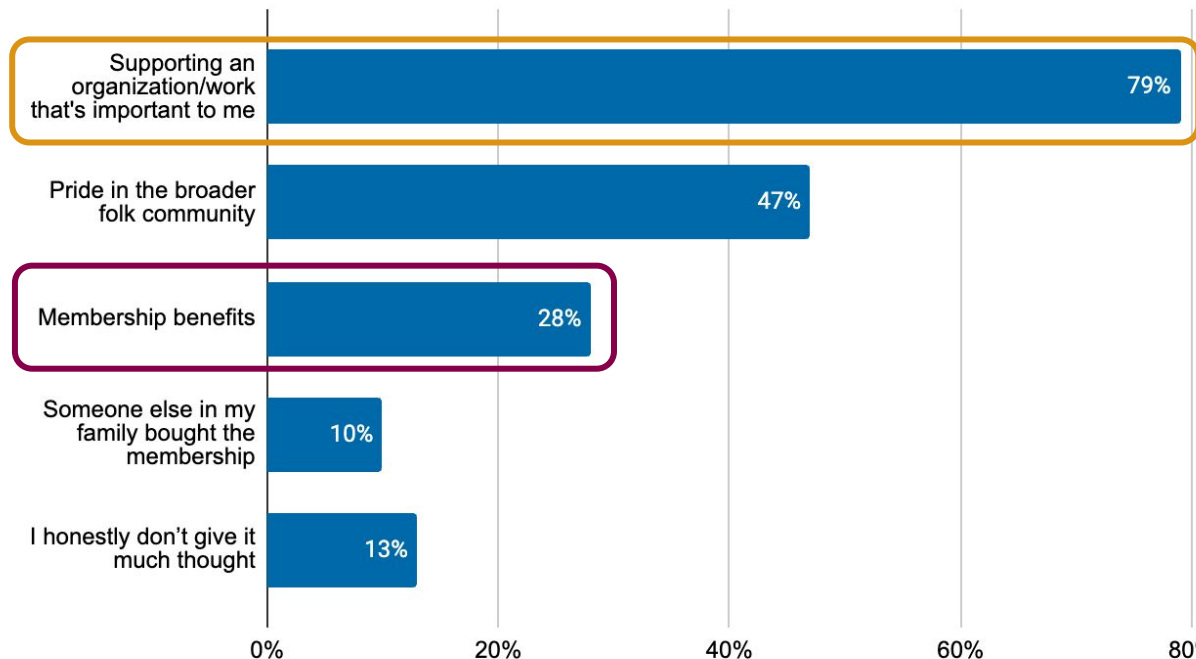
Many of the CDSS members not in it for benefits

Membership was motivated by supporting CDSS work and folk community pride

The large majority (**79%**) believed in supporting an organization/work that's important to them.

Only **28%** were motivated by CDSS membership benefits.

CDSS Membership motivations



Lack of awareness of CDSS was the predominant reason for non-membership

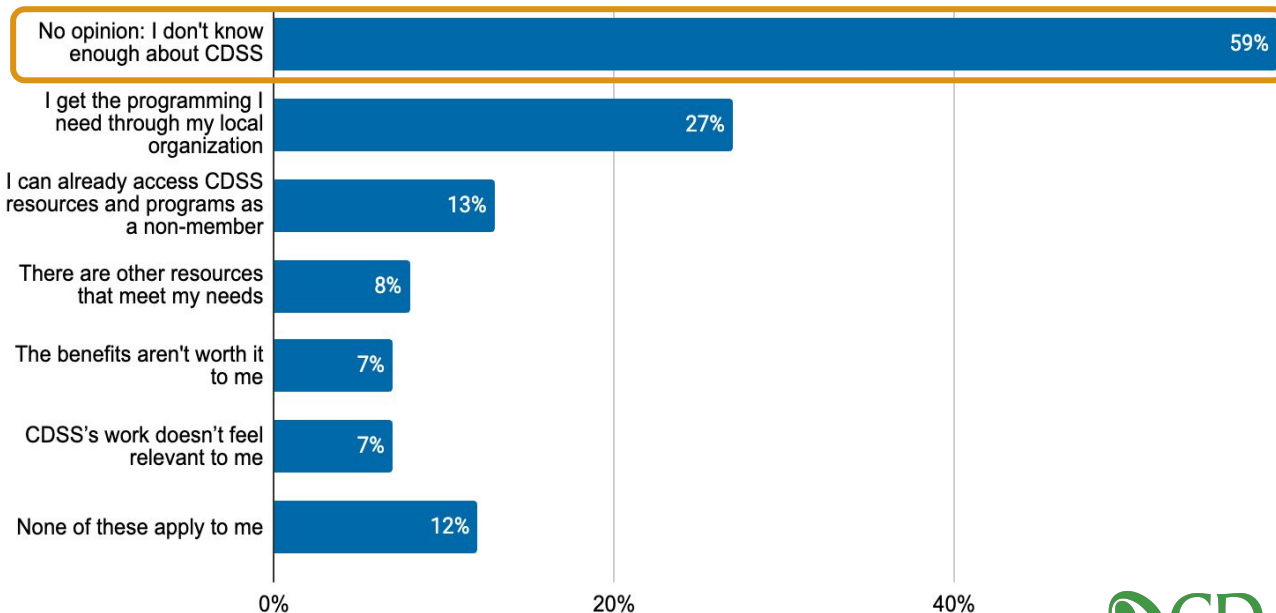
'No opinion'

Across several questions regarding possible barriers to membership, nearly two-thirds selected 'no opinion: I don't know enough about CDSS.'

Local organization reliance

One quarter (27%) reported relying on their local organizations for programming. *(Some of these organizations were likely CDSS affiliates.)*

Barriers to CDSS Membership



N=664 Do CDSS offerings (or lack thereof) keep you from being a member? Please select all that apply:

N=664 Which financial considerations keep you from being a CDSS member? Please select all that apply:

N=664 Are there any additional factors that keep you from being a CDSS member? Please select all that apply:

Survey results

Demographics & folk activity participation

CDSS sentiment & membership

Asks for CDSS

Respondents cared deeply about their folk communities and shared many ideas

Half answered an optional open-ended question

All 457 responses were analyzed and coded into one or more themes.

The most common themes are shared in this report, and there were additional themes and opinions shared by respondents.

Many asks were age-agnostic

Response themes from this cohort largely matched sentiments from annual CDSS membership surveys.

Open-ended prompt:

“Put your thinking cap on!
If you could ask CDSS to do something that would benefit you and/or the folk community in the next five years, **what would you most like CDSS to do?**”

**Recruiting
&
Outreach**

**Organizing
Resources**

**Training
&
Skills**

**Diversity
&
Inclusion**

**Programming
Accessibility**

Respondents were focused on supporting their local recurring events

Recruiting & outreach support requested

Respondents wanted guidance on reaching out to and retaining participants, particularly young ones, at their local recurring events. They wanted their communities to feel friendly, safe and inclusive.

This focus matched their reported attendance patterns of 60% mostly attending recurring events.

*“We could really use **help figuring out how to encourage attendance** to our regular contra dances, especially younger folks.”*

*“I’d also like to see more effort to get people talking to each other and **creating friendships across generational divides.**”*

Building safe dances, connecting organizers, and running events were common asks

Promote physical and identity (eg queer, BIPOC) safety through codes of conduct, training, and resources

“Really strong resources and workshops for dealing with dancers who make others feel unwelcome and uncomfortable, especially on grounds of race, sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression.”

Connect leaders across communities

*“CDSS would do really well to **connect organizers with one another** so we can network, share information and funding opportunities, brainstorm about the unique situations we run into, and **transmit knowledge about how to run a group.**”*

Reduce overhead through event toolkits

*“Provide concrete benefits to organizational members: **Skill training for marketing, design, finance, shared platform for ticketing** that has a low fee, information on how small organizations can implement technology that makes sense for them.”*

Respondents hoped for accessible training to develop skills and sustain their communities

Skill building across leadership roles

Half (51%) of respondents indicated that they would like to learn or grow skills in folk leadership roles. Sound engineering was the second-most requested skill respondents hoped to develop.

Hurdles to overcome

Respondents noted a number of challenges in developing skills as leaders, including the accessibility of organized workshops as well as lack of opportunities and mentorship.

“We don’t really have a next generation of talent. We’re starting to focus more on that locally, but it’s a big problem we can’t shift alone.”

“Provide mentorship, support, etc. CDSS can play a role in connecting learners with mentors who might not be geographically collocated.”

N=457, 807 responses coded: “Put your thinking cap on! If you could ask CDSS to do something that would benefit you and/or the folk community in the next five years, what would you most like CDSS to do?”

N= 420 Of the things listed above, which, if any, would you want to learn more about (e.g. learn how to call English, run sound, lead pub sings, etc.)?



Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mattered

Increased diversity

Respondents wanted more diversity in participants and leaders, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, and economic background.

“I want camp to be attractive and accessible to BIPOC folks, with more mutual flow of learning traditions.”

DEI education & resources

Respondents believed CDSS could play a key role in supporting these efforts.

“Continue to provide resources for understanding and discussing the racial and cultural diversity of folk song and dance.”

Gender inclusivity, especially for dance calling*

Respondents wanted more inclusive spaces and the resources to develop them, viewing gender neutral terminology as a way to create spaces friendly to all.

“Perhaps a training or workshop to help folks safely explore why change in language might not just be kind to a few individuals, but also promoting a safe and inclusive culture.”

*>2% of responses expressed negativity towards gender neutral calling



N=457, 807 responses coded: “Put your thinking cap on! If you could ask CDSS to do something that would benefit you and/or the folk community in the next five years, what would you most like CDSS to do?”

Increased access to programming beyond New England and folk community hubs requested

More online programming

Remote events were mentioned as a way to increase access to training, increase CDSS visibility, and connect individuals and smaller organizations with limited access to camps and larger communities.

Overcome New England centrism

Some respondents perceived CDSS as a New England centered organization that disproportionately represented local interests.

“There is nothing available in my area.”

*“It feels like **the folk community is centered on Massachusetts** and the further you are from it the less support you get.”*

*“I see the value of continuing to **offer online workshops, lectures, and concerts** as a way to bring CDSS programming to communities outside of New England.”*

“I think we need more solutions than asking people to travel to events.”





Key takeaways & opportunities

Key takeaways & opportunities

Survey insight	Opportunities for CDSS
Many respondents were overall unaware of CDSS and its offerings. Most were not CDSS members, although many believed they participated in CDSS affiliate events.	<p>Boost awareness of existing resources through affiliate relationships (eg local communities).</p> <p>Evaluate the role of membership in engaging the community we serve.</p>
A number of requests were for resources that CDSS has or is currently developing.	Create a CDSS Affiliate Coordinator role to connect local communities to CDSS resources and understand unmet resourcing needs.
Half of respondents were engaged as leaders in their communities, with Contra dance as the most commonly reported activity.	<p>Support leadership training opportunities, particularly for contra-related skill sets.</p> <p>Explore possible reasons for lower participation rates for CDSS-supported activities other than contra.</p>
A common theme was a desire to support and grow respondents' local communities: recruiting and retaining more participants, particularly young ones.	Facilitate organizers connecting across communities, especially to foster intergenerational relationships in communities.
Key values for these respondents included increasing BIPOC participation and leadership, gender inclusivity, and promoting safe dancing	<p>Curate, create, and promote awareness of DEI resources (Codes of Conduct, safety task group toolkit, etc).</p> <p>Enact CDSS Strategic Plan to embed cultural equity in programming.</p>

CDSS Strategic Plan focus areas 2024-2029

- **Help affiliates adapt in a changing world** ■

Many of our affiliate communities are facing challenges related to pandemic recovery and generational leadership shifts. CDSS will provide support and leadership to set communities up for long term success by bringing people together, providing resources and learning opportunities, and facilitating the transfer of knowledge.

- **Re-evaluate and update the CDSS membership model**

More people participate in the traditions in our mission than are reflected ▲ our current base of support. CDSS aims to develop an updated membership model that values current contributors and participants, and attracts new supporters, while better connecting with the broader communities we serve.

- **Achieve financial sustainability**

CDSS will expand and diversify our funding ● streams in order to balance the budget, launch strategic initiatives, and sustain our mission into the future.

- **Embed cultural equity in CDSS programs and operations**

In the context of CDSS, cultural equity encompasses the values, policies, and practices + that ensure that all people have access to the dance, music, and song traditions defined in our mission. We will embed cultural equity in our work, with a focus on increasing access to CDSS resources, removing barriers to program participation, and researching and sharing the complete histories of the traditions we steward.

Opportunity & Strategic Plan alignment

Survey insight	Opportunities for CDSS
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More info & next steps

This virtual town hall was recorded.

[Please check out the recording here.](#)

Have additional questions or feedback?

Reach out to resources@cdss.org.

Next steps:

This is just the beginning of an ongoing conversation. CDSS is planning a web chat later in 2024 on this topic.



Thank you!