



How to Facilitate an Organizers Discussion

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Compiled on behalf of CDSS by Emily Addison

FIRST... A BIG THANK YOU!

Thank you to **Chrissy Fowler** (Belfast, ME), **Dela Murphy** (Portland, ME), **Lisa Greenleaf** (Bolton, MA), **Delia Clark** (Taftsville, VT), **Gaye Fifer** (Pittsburgh, PA), **Linda Henry** (Amherst, MA), **Scott Higgs**, and the **Puttin' on the Dance team** who provided significant content for this project. If you find this resource useful, please give these folks a BIG thank you the next time you see them.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The goal of this document is to support YOU in facilitating discussions among traditional dance, music and song organizers. This is part of a larger initiative to encourage more local and regional organizer discussions across North America.

Local organizers of traditional dance, music, and song often end up together at local and regional events (e.g., morris ales; folk festivals; English country dance weekends). **These events are perfect opportunities to share ideas and to develop support networks.** If you're planning to attend an event that brings dancers, musicians, or singers together then YOU can use the following materials to organize your own organizer discussion session!

Alternatively, if there are organizers in your local or regional area who never get together then **invite them to gather for a half or full day.** Fellow organizers may be interested in discussing how you can all work together to strengthen your respective groups, how to solve common challenges and/or how to implement new initiatives. Throw in a potluck and a local dance/sing/jam and you have a great event.

Never facilitated before? Don't be intimidated! You don't need to be a subject expert or established leader to facilitate an organizer discussion. You simply need to create a space for organizers to get together and then support those organizers in sharing experiences and ideas.

Strength comes from working collaboratively with others – let's make more of this happen!

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Pages 5-10:	Appendices: These are individual resources (e.g., handouts) provided the contributors. Thus, there may be some repetition across the appendices.

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We explicitly request that you **do not reprint content from this handout** as your own. The contributors have generously shared advice to support local organizers of traditional dance, music, and song. If you would like to refer to content from the handout, please provide credit to the contributors and cite this document as the source.

1. PLANNING YOUR SESSION

This section contains tips on how to plan an organizer discussion whether it's part of a larger event or a stand-alone gathering.

Facilitating an organizer discussion at a larger event:

1. **Pitch your idea to the event organizers:** If you want to lead a session, simply approach the event organizers –they are often very receptive! Include why you think a session would be of value to both participants and to the event, a (brief!) proposed outline, and a few preferences for timing.
2. **Session description:** Once confirmed, provide the event organizers with a catchy title and description so they can promote your session by including it in the official schedule, etc.
3. **Promote the session yourself:** Prior to event, spread the word among organizers in your region through individual invites and/or discussion forums. (List of forums: <https://www.cdss.org/resources/how-to/organizers#online-discussions>). CDSS can also promote your session through Shop Talk if we have enough advanced notice. (Info here: <https://www.cdss.org/resources/how-to/organizers#shop-talk>)
4. **Session length:** Organizer discussions are typically 60-90 minutes.
5. **Space requirements:** It is often effective to begin a session by having participants talk in a circle and then have them break off into smaller groups. Find out ahead of time what your facility can accommodate (e.g., how many chairs?).
6. **Supplies:** Facilitators usually provide their own supplies. You may want to consider chart paper, masking tape, lots of markers, sticky notes, a sign-in sheet (see below), and handout (see below). If you are using walls to post chart paper, make sure your markers don't run through paper. As appropriate, prepare information to be presented on chart paper ahead of time (e.g., session agenda, outline, etc).

Organizing a stand-alone event for organizers:

1. **Create an invite list:** Consider who you want to talk to. Perhaps it's local organizers involved in similar activities but from totally different traditions (e.g., contra dance organizers may want to collaborate with other social dance groups such as swing and salsa). Perhaps you want to bring together organizers in your city who all fit under the larger traditional arts umbrella (e.g., traditional square dance group, fiddle club, trad song circle, and the storytelling collective). Perhaps you want to invite everyone who organizes the same activity as you within a five hour drive.
2. **Develop a creative invite:** If fellow organizers are not used to getting together, it may take a bit of encouragement to get them to participate - after all, everyone seems so busy these days! Be very clear about the goals of the gathering. Start by asking the organizers what would make the gathering most useful to them. Tell them that you hope everyone will walk away with at the end of the event with helpful ideas, tools, and connections with other organizers.
3. **Schedule:** Create a schedule (e.g., various time slots that will focus on a range of overarching topics). Towards the end, build in some time to discuss how the group can continue to support each other in the future.
4. **Space requirements:** This depends on who you invite and your schedule. You may want to consider hosting the event at someone's home since a more informal setting can create a community feel conducive to collaboration. If organizers are coming from a distance, consider providing billeting (housing) with help from local volunteers.
5. **Supplies:** See above. Except – LOTS of food! Consider making it a potluck event.
6. **Social time:** Build in social/fun time by enjoying some dance, music, and song together.

2. STRUCTURING YOUR SESSION

The following models have worked extremely well at past traditional dance discussion sessions of approximately 25-40 people. Consider what will work best for the goals you have, type of crowd you are expecting, and their potential interests.

Small affinity group discussions based upon participant-developed topics:

1. **Introduction:** Ask each participant to *briefly* identify one topic they want to discuss (e.g., what they could use help on; something that they currently find overwhelming). Ask listeners to pay attention and identify who they might want to talk with. Note: The facilitator needs to manage this process so that each participant keeps their introduction VERY brief. (If you have a very large group, consider another approach as go-arounds can end up taking too much time.)
2. **Break out into affinity groups:** Have participants break into affinity groups based on topics of interest, making compromises as needed (e.g., if only one person wants to talk about marketing and five want to talk about attracting young folks, the one person will likely fit in the larger group, so combine them). You can facilitate the creation of the breakout groups by taking notes of overlapping topics during the introduction, pointing out common topics at the end, and identifying specific locations in the room for discussing certain topics.
3. **Affinity group discussions:** Time these conversations for 20-30 minutes, encouraging participants to share best practices, ideas, and solutions. Give a wrap up warning about two minutes before you bring the whole group back together, asking folks to consider what should be shared with the other session participants.
4. **Whole group discussion:** Have each affinity group share "ah-ha" moments or information that might be beneficial to all.
5. **Thank participants and close:** Consider providing a handout with ways that participants can continue the conversation. Provide an email sign up so you can send a follow-up survey to gather feedback as well as notes from the section.

Small group exploration of a topic(s) proposed by the session leaders:

1. **Choose a discussion topic(s) ahead of time:** Prior to your session, consult with other organizers about current topics of interest. Then pick one (or a few) to explore. (Example: *Some events feel warm; everyone helps with chores, and welcomes newcomers. At other events, participants feel disconnected. The vision of organizers and leaders makes the difference. How? Let's talk.*) If you are set on one topic, you may want to communicate that broadly ahead of time so organizers know what to expect and can decide whether they want to discuss that topic.
2. **Introduction + small discussion groups:** Introduce the topic(s). You may want to suggest some headings to help facilitate discussion. For example, if the main topic is 'increasing attendance', encourage small groups to discuss: (1) How to attract brand new people to attend their first time; (2) How to encourage first-timers to come back and; (3) How to engage/motivate regular attendees to make the activity 'a habit', volunteer, and bring new people.
3. **Small groups present their ideas:** As with the first model, have the small groups share their ideas back with the whole group.

Question Jam

"Question Jam" in silence (see appendix worksheet). Folks write their question, then pass it along to the person next to them who writes a response, then passes to the next. Important: This should be done in silence and should be "top of mind" responses that are quickly written. Go around until you receive your own sheet back and then review the group's responses. (When introducing the activity, tell the participants that you'll collect the sheets and email scanned copies out.) Then break out into affinity groups (see above) for the rest of the session.

Informal lunchtime discussion tables

Prior to the event, arrange with the event organizer that (1) you will put a sign(s) on a table(s) during the lunch break AND (2) the organizer will promote the discussion tables to the event participants. There can either be one table where all the interested organizers can talk about whatever is on their mind, or you could set up a few tables based on specific topics of interest. It's great to find ways to choose topics that are of interest to the organizers who are present. For instance, have organizers write down their discussion topic directly on a card to be put on a table (i.e., that table's theme) OR have organizers write down their ideas prior to lunch and you come up with themes based upon the suggestions.

See Appendix 1 for other ideas on how you can structure your session.

3. TIPS FOR FACILITATION

Goals:

Here are three suggested goals. Think about whether these resonate for you and/or what goals you want to have for your session. Just before your session begins, remind yourself of your goals to maximize the possibility of success.

1. Have participants experience as many “ah-ha” moments as possible through effective participant sharing of best practices and solutions. (Avoid offering your own solutions as much as possible.)
2. Make the session both fun and useful -> part of this is setting a warm, positive, and enthusiastic tone as the facilitator.
3. Encourage the conversation to continue after your session finishes so that organizers have more likelihood of achieving their goals.

General notes:

- Small groups allow for more voices to be heard and minimize the impact of individuals who tend to dominate conversations. If possible, divide participants into groups of 4-7 people as groups of 8 or more tend to be too large for productive conversations.
- There are often many topics that organizers want to discuss. However, a 60-90min session goes by very quickly. Thus, it's important to quickly move beyond the participants simply listing what they want to discuss (e.g., their challenges; topics of interest) and get right into sharing useful information about those subject (e.g., problem-solving; solutions; best practices).
- Develop respectful and effective ways to refocus conversations. The whole group will appreciate it and you'll get more done.
- Ask, don't tell: Focus all conversations by asking powerful, directed questions.
- End every conversation **before** everything has been said and before the energy leaves the room or group. It will leave participants wanting to keep the conversation going!

Introductions (i.e., how to open a session):

- Provide a brief welcome as the session leader and an outline of the session.
- Invite everyone in the circle to introduce themselves by **JUST** providing their name and their home community. Perhaps ask participants to include one thing they want to learn from the group. Watch out --> depending on the size of group and how long people talk, this can take up most of the session!
- Don't be shy about interjecting if someone goes off topic. Remind them about the purpose of the quick go-around and transition onto the next person.

Tangible take-homes and keeping the dialogue going after your session:

- At the end of the session encourage participants to take action. For instance, have participants identify one idea that really resonated with them and encourage participants to do something about that idea within the next month.
- Handouts can be useful. Don't spend much (if any) time on the handout during the session. Consider including:
 - Resources (e.g., websites like the CDSS Organizers Portal; discussion forums like Shared Weight)
 - A few best practices that speak strongly to you (e.g., articulate your vision --> if not for your event then for yourself as an organizer)
- Some facilitators follow-up with participants post-session.
 - Consider collecting participant contact information and share it among those who attended so that they can continue the conversation post session.
 - Consider sending out a post-event survey to gather feedback on how you can make improve for next time.
 - Consider either recording the session, having a volunteer note-taker, and/or taking photographs of brainstorming sheets. Send these out to participants and/or post online as a resource.

Impact-Feasibility Lens:

There are so many great ideas that come up during these discussions → how are organizers to choose what ideas they should try? Encourage organizers to consider each idea through an impact-feasibility lens. Organizers can rate ideas based up how much IMPACT the idea will have (i.e., how likely will the idea result in what they want to have happen) and how FEASIBLE the idea is (i.e., how much time, energy, & resources will the idea take to implement).

APPENDIX 1: FACILITATION MANUAL

Delia Clark is a long-time caller and dance organizer and has also facilitated hundreds of gatherings over 30 years. She has created an incredible manual on facilitation which is well worth reading if you want to learn more. You can access the manual here:

<https://www.cdss.org/images/organizers-resources/Delia-Clark-Facilitation-Manual-Oct-2018.pdf>

APPENDIX 2: LINKS TO NOTES FROM PREVIOUS ORGANIZER SESSIONS:

1. Notes from the Dance Flurry 2019 organizer discussion: <https://www.cdss.org/images/organizers-resources/dance-flurry-session-summary-2019.02.17.pdf>
2. Notes from the Dance Flurry 2018 organizer discussion: <https://www.cdss.org/images/organizers-resources/dance-flurry-session-summary-2018.02.14.pdf>
3. Notes from the Dance Flurry 2017 organizer discussion: <https://www.cdss.org/images/organizers-resources/dance-flurry-organizers-discussion-2017.02.19.pdf>
4. Notes from the 2017 NEFFA (New England Folk Festival) broader audience discussion <http://weapa.com/NEFFA-2017-big-themes-2.html>
5. Notes from the 2016 NEFFA broader audience discussion <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d84e8k4vpQc&feature=youtu.be>

APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE TABLE DISCUSSIONS DURING LUNCH:

In 2018, Dela Murphy led an organizers discussion session at Hey Fever (Ottawa's contra dance weekend). There were 26 organizers who participated from total of 160 dance weekend attendees ... a great turn out! The session was formal in that it used the 'affinity discussion group' model described above. However, it was during lunch and organizers talked while they ate – it worked well!



Photos used with permission of session participants.

APPENDIX 4: EXAMPLE OF DISCUSSION SESSION OUTLINE FROM NEFFA

The outline below is from one of Lisa Greenleaf and Scott Higgs' NEFFA discussion sessions. These annual discussions are aimed at the wider dance audience (i.e., not specific to organizers). However, many of the topics are of interest to organizers. This outline is a great example of a more guided approach.

PART 1. Introduction

We're interested in what YOU do, as opposed to your opinions about what other people do. Share your stories and listen to others' stories.

PART 2. Review questions and explain the set-up for Part 3

- 1. How do you think about the larger social context when you find a partner?** (Choosing beginners or new people, choosing partners who may not be exciting to dance with but are clearly part of the community, choosing partners who are a lot younger or older than you are, etc.)?
→How do you balance this with personal satisfaction and fun?
→ Is there a shift with gender imbalance or lots of beginners?
- 2. Are there circumstances in which asking or being asked is uncomfortable? What characterizes these situations?**
→Are there social rules that we abide by?
→What techniques do you use to avoid or say no to someone you'd rather not partner with?
→Have you ever had conversation with someone about a) why you don't want to partner them or b) conditions under which you will dance with them (dance style, behavior, personal grooming)?
- 3. What are your strategies for partnering with someone you particularly want to dance with?**
→Do you usually arrange to book ahead, or is that relatively rare? We want to avoid judgment here about what's "right" and "wrong", and just sketch a description of how you find partners. If you have made a conscious decision about booking or not booking, please briefly describe how you came to that decision.
{**Spoken: in addition to the conscious decision and patterns, there are also subconscious/unconscious things we tend to do that also have an impact ...
- 4. Are you ever aware of the subconscious patterns you fall into when partnering?**
→If you are feeling shy or insecure, do you stay within a familiar social group? If you don't know anyone, do you hang back and wait to be asked?
→How often do you go outside your familiar partnering zone? What motivates you to either do it or not do it?
→Do you find yourself often dancing with the same people, and almost never dancing with others? If this is not a conscious decision, what other factors might be influencing it?

PART 3: Sharing your thoughts in a circle mixer

There are four questions. Innies are facing outies. You and the person you are facing have the same question, either question 1,2, 3 or 4. If you and your first partner have question 1, then the people next to you have a different number question. You and your current partner each ask the question of the other, then at the leader's signal, the outies all move one place to the right: You are now facing a new person who has a new question for you. You yourself keep asking the same question, so that if you started with question 1, you will ask that of 4 people total. At end, each person has given a personal response to all 4 questions, and has heard 4 answers to the question they asked.

PART 4: Quick reporting back in to the whole group

Get the #1s to report first, then the #2s, etc ...

Closing thoughts:

- How can you as dancers influence patterns of partnering? (You with your own choices and self-awareness.)
- Discussing w/ community leaders
- Understanding you don't have to be a leader to have an influence --> to be welcoming and inclusive.

APPENDIX 5: SESSION HANDOUT EXAMPLE

The original handout was one full 8X11 sheet. We have shortened the space provided for participants to fill in their answers below.

THE DANCE FLURRY – DANCE ORGANIZERS UNITE FOR DISCUSSION 2018 – YEAR 3!

FIVE FAVOURITE RESOURCES:

1. The Country Dance and Song Society:
 - a. CDSS organizers page which is FULL of great resources www.cdss.org/resources/how-to/organizers-resources
 - b. Canadian organizers survey report released THIS WEEK! www.cdss.org/cn-survey
 - c. CDSS organizer e-blasts NEW INITIATIVE! Sign up here: bit.ly/2sqQr4B
 - d. CDSS News (magazine) www.cdss.org/programs/cdss-news-publications/cdss-news
 - e. For additional support, contact Linda Henry (CDSS Community Resources Manager) at linda@cdss.org
2. Shared Weight email discussion forum: www.sharedweight.net/
3. Facebook Organizers of Contra Dances: www.facebook.com/groups/111126912393768/
4. POTD 3 – dance organizers conference date and location TBA: www.puttinonthedance.org
5. Organize your own organizer discussion at a dance weekend – even a casual discussion over lunch ☺

IDEAS FOR INCREASING ATTENDANCE:

With each idea, think about **IMPACT** (i.e., how much impact will the idea have on attendance?)

VS. **FEASIBILITY** (i.e., how much time, energy, & resources will the idea take to implement?)

AND →What are the details that really 'make or break' the success of the idea?

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

.....original handout had space for organizers to write here

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

.....original handout had space for organizers to write here

3. Engaging/Motivating regulars to 'make it a habit'... bring new people... volunteer:

.....original handout had space for organizers to write here

In addition to thinking about BEST PRACTICES, it can be helpful to think about what NOT TO DO

(i.e., why potential people don't come if they have heard about the event; why new don't come back; what turns folks off)

NEXT STEPS:

What is one idea from today you really want to implement? _____

Let's all take action within the next month on one thing we learned today!

APPENDIX 6: SIGN-UP SHEET EXAMPLE

Consider collecting the contact information from all participants through a sign-up sheet. Then type it up afterwards along with the notes from the session email it out to the participants so that they can continue the conversation.

2018 Dance Flurry – Organizers Contact List

Please do not share this list with others...

permission was granted to share among this group only. Thanks!

Your name	Your email address	Name of your organization	Your state/ province	Share your email with this group?	
				Yes	No

APPENDIX 7: FACILITATOR HANDOUT FROM PUTTIN' ON THE DANCE 2

Facilitation Skills

Suggestions for session leaders at Puttin' On the Dance, Nov. 2011

Here is a list of some skills and techniques for effective facilitation, offered in the spirit of being helpful and inspiring :) , which you might want to consider or keep in the back of your mind as you make final preparations for your session at the Northeast Dance Organizers Conference.

Skills & techniques for effective facilitation:

- Create a safe, non-judgmental learning environment
- Actively listen to others, with genuine openness to variety of ideas
- Communicate clearly
- Check understanding, summarize, and synthesize different ideas
- Think and act creatively
- Manage people's feelings, de-personalize issues (keep focus on exchange of ideas or concepts, not individuals who suggest them)
- Welcome variety, diversity, respectful disagreement (spice of life!)
- Balance the group's participation to involve everyone (draw people out, redirect monopolizers)
- Guide the process using questions and other tactics (see below for juicy examples)
- Focus (and re-focus) conversation on topic at hand
- Appreciate people for sharing ideas (encourages involvement)
- Exhibit and encourage humor and respect
- Be well-prepared while remaining flexible
- Moderate the session without necessarily leading to pre-established conclusions (no one is the exclusive 'expert'; session leaders haven't got all the answers)
- Use flip charts to record key points or brainstorming (visually documenting content)
- Assign a note-taker to record of session content (perhaps on flip charts for group's benefit)
- Keep to time
- Relax and enjoy the people and the process!

Using Questions to Facilitate Discussion

"Don't make a statement when you can ask a question instead." Remember that a response requires time to think. Once you pose a question, pause for five seconds (may seem like eternity) and wait for a response. Then count silently to ten before asking a follow-up question. Following are a few examples of questions you might find useful in different situations:

- ***There is a disagreement, or you think an incorrect or outrageous statement has been made:***
"So, in your mind, one of the significant aspects is X. How do others see it?"
"Will you tell us, Sarah, in light of your experience, what your thought is?"
- ***Someone says something that is unclear or could be misinterpreted:***
"Could you say something more about that?"
"You mentioned (X). Can you say a little more about that?"
"Bill, will you show us how this might work by giving an example?"
- ***The group is straying off the subject:***
"I'm getting the sense that we're getting off topic. We're discussing (X)."
"It seems that we have strayed off track. Let's re-focus."
- ***Someone has been silent throughout the process:***
"Ed has suggested (X). Caroline, given your experience, what do you think?"
- ***You are unclear about what has been said or what the point is:***
"George, I think I understand your point. You are saying (X). Is that correct?"
- ***Someone makes the same point repeatedly, or won't stop talking about their idea:***
"You feel strongly about this point, and I want to be sure we have captured it. Is this (point to flip chart where the person's idea is written down) accurate wording for what you want to say?"

Additional Techniques for Facilitating Troublesome Situations

- When people are holding side conversations vs. focusing on the discussion:**
 Continue your job as facilitator, while moving closer to the people who are chatting. Since most people will be paying attention to you, the people having the side conversation will soon realize that people are looking at them, too. This may quiet them down without you actually having to quiet them directly.
- When two people are talking at once:**
 Act as “traffic police.” Smile, put your hand up to stop one speaker, and point to the other speaker, saying “Okay, Mary, why don’t you go first, and then George, let’s hear from you next.”
- If someone is being disrespectful to others or to you:**
 Gently remind people about the “ground rules” for the conference. Acknowledge that these are important discussions and tempers may flare, but that the learning will be richer if we can put personal differences aside and focus on the ideas we share in common.
- When someone insists on talking about something that is off the topic:**
 First, make sure you understand the point that the person is making. Then, if necessary, you can make a special page of flip-chart paper called “Other Issues.” Here, you can record ideas that may not belong under the categories you are now working with. You can tell the speaker, “We don’t want this idea to get lost. However, since it doesn’t specifically address this subject, we will record it here, and make sure that it is included in the final record of the session.” Then, move the group back to the question at hand.
- If someone is talking too much and dominating the discussion:**
 Walk up close to the speaker, and as they pause for breath, say something like, “I feel that you’ve said a lot, and I just want to be sure to incorporate it into our flip chart. Can I ask you to stop for a moment and summarize your point in one sentence?” Once the idea has been recorded, you can use the flip chart to later remind the speaker, “Yes, I believe that you made that point, and it is recorded right here.”
- Remember...** Always assume that participants’ comments are based on positive intentions. Everyone is here because they are interested and want to make a contribution. So, relax and enjoy yourself!

APPENDIX 8: EXAMPLES OF TOPICS THAT ARE OF INTEREST TO DANCE ORGANIZERS

Organizers who attended the 2017 Dance Flurry discussion session were asked to identify their top three topics of interest. The figure below illustrates the relative popularity of various topics.



Other topics written down by participants: (1) Paying for dance weekends – credit cards vs cheques (2) Skill building among 'experienced' dancers (3) General consent building.

Similar figures are available in the CDSS Canadian and US organizers surveys.

- Canada: <https://www.cdss.org/community/cn-survey>
- US: <https://www.cdss.org/community/us-organizers-survey>

APPENDIX 9: QUESTION JAM HANDOUT

Action Storming for Organizers!

Consider an urgent or important inquiry or issue you have right now as an organizer. In the space below, describe the situation so that someone who is not involved can understand what is happening. Then, ask a question you'd like folks in the room to respond to.

YOUR SITUATION:

Keep your story concise and clear. Three to four sentences is perfect.

YOUR QUESTION:

Keep your question focused on brainstorming. Effective examples include:

What do you do to promote your dance that has worked well?

In what ways do you thank your volunteers that are meaningful?

How have you meaningfully increased attendance at your dance?

What would you do if you were in my shoes?)

RESPONSES FROM OTHERS:

Keep your responses concise and clear. One sentence is perfect, then pass this sheet on!