

**Part
0**

Introduction

The CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group (CCSTG) aims to support local communities in their efforts to provide a safe environment for music, song, and dance events. This toolkit is an effort to provide advice and resources that will help organizers develop the policies, procedures, and supporting documents needed to understand and facilitate safety in their communities.

CDSS is not prescriptive in regard to what your community “should be doing.” We recognize and value the range of living traditions practiced by our communities.

Structure of this Toolkit

Building a safe and welcoming event space includes providing for everyone’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being, especially sexual safety. This can include addressing a range of problems, from feelings of discomfort to perceived discrimination to actual bodily harm. Organizers can develop procedures to handle problems along this spectrum.

Communities should consider having the following set of documents to facilitate safety in its many nuances. We hope these tools will help you develop your own set of safety documents. This toolkit is intended for you to pull out and adapt the language and policies that work for your community.

Part 1: Statement of Community Values

This is where you describe the environment you strive to create.

Your values are the justification for policies and actions that uphold them. This is in addition to mission and vision statements, as part of your organizing documents.

- **Part 1A:** [Creating a statement of community values](#)
- **Part 1B:** [Possible governance models and processes](#)
- **Part 1C:** [Examples of community values statements](#)

Part 2: Code of Conduct

A code of conduct codifies behavioral expectations, specifies what behavior will not be tolerated, and outlines what the consequences will be for infractions.

This is a policy document (not by-laws), based on community values.

- **Part 2:** [Brief overview, with links to a comprehensive guide from an outside consulting firm, and links to examples from a few dance communities](#)
- Check the [CDSS Resource Portal](#) for more resources.

Part 3: Courtesy and Etiquette Guidelines (a.k.a. Shaping Culture)

This section offers advice for how to create tips and guidance (preferably in “do” rather than “don’t” language) that help prevent offenses from occurring.

- **Part 3:** [Courtesy and Etiquette Guidelines \(a.k.a. Shaping Culture\)](#)
- Check the [CDSS Resource Portal](#) for more ideas.

Part 4: Complaint Procedures

These outline the ways and means of handling complaints and infractions.

Whom to complain to; who follows up; how complaints are handled; timeliness of response; confidentiality; due process; documentation; legal concerns; levels of severity; pathways for improvement and pathways for ultimate removal.

- The best guide we have found on this topic is [How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports](#), by Valerie Aurora and Mary Gardiner, available for free from Frame Shift Consulting. Just download the PDF! This guide covers what to include and what to leave out, as well as guidance for how to respond to infractions.
- In addition, the following examples provide sample language you can use, in the dance context. Local organizers can adopt these procedures for their own policies, or adapt them as needed. An additional writing template would be duplicative, so we simply encourage you to review these examples and cite them as a source as you craft your own complaint procedures:
 - [BIDA “How We Can Help”](#)
 - [Old Farmer’s Ball Complaint Procedures](#)
 - [Conradance Umbrella \(Montpelier, VT\) Policy for Dealing with Complaints of Inappropriate Behavior](#)

- [Taking a Safety Report, by Jeff Kaufman](#)
- [Philadelphia Area Traditional Music and Dance Policy and Procedures for Dealing With Complaints of Inappropriate Behavior](#)

Part 5: Safety in the Physical Space: the Venue

This serves as a checklist of things to consider and manage, such as trip hazards, first aid, emergency medical procedures, ADA accessibility, decibel levels, etc.

- [Part 5: Safety in the Physical Space: The Venue](#)

Part 6: Resources for Considering the Use of Non-Gendered Terminology

This section discusses the arguments for and against non-gendered dance terminology, and offers examples of alternative terms.

- [Part 6: Resources for Considering the Use of Non-Gendered Terminology](#)

Part 7: Managing chemical sensitivities

This guide contains four parts:

- [Part 7A: Making dance and music spaces accessible to participants with chemical sensitivities—a brief summary](#)
- [Part 7B: Scents and Access in Dance Spaces: An Introduction](#)—an effort to educate local dance organizers about what chemical sensitivities are and how they are a barrier to participating in music, dance, and song events for otherwise eager participants.
- [Part 7C: Resources for Implementing a Fragrance-Free Policy](#) contains suggestions for educating the community about this issue and tips for minimizing chemical stimulants that can be a health hazard for those with sensitivities.
- [Part 7D: Fragrance-Free Products](#) gives tips for how to interpret product labels to identify scented vs. unscented products, as well as a list of fragrance-free products that were recommended by dancers who have sensitivities, and where to find them.

Part 8: How to organize and/or facilitate a community meeting that will leave everyone smiling

- [Part 8: How to organize and/or facilitate a community meeting that will leave everyone smiling](#) provides tips for facilitating a community meeting to gather input, discuss ideas, and/or make final decisions related to controversial topics. It also includes guidance for how to find a qualified outside facilitator, if that is your preference, so that group leaders can be equal participants in the conversation.

Working Definitions

As we worked, we realized that we needed some working definitions for the concepts we were grappling with.

Safety	Freedom from physical, mental, emotional, or sexual harm or fear of such harm in one's immediate environment
Respect	Due regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, needs, boundaries, or traditions of others.
Inclusion	Welcoming all individuals regardless of any personal characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, body shape, financial means, education, or tpolitical views.
Courtesy	Behavior and manners that demonstrate consideration and respect for others, such as saying “please,” “excuse me,” asking for consent, etc. Courtesy includes sensitivity to and accommodation of individual and cultural differences. It is a (hoped for) constant in general society, as in the Platinum Rule.
Etiquette	The set of rules and behavioral expectations specific to a particular group. These are expectations that go beyond simple courtesy, e.g., joining a line of dancers at the bottom of the set, or norms for finding a partner.

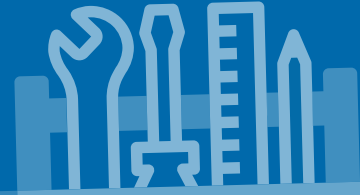
- **Safety** is the ultimate goal.
- **Respect** and **Inclusion** are the underlying “what” that help people feel emotionally safe.
- **Courtesy** and **Etiquette** are the “how”—how to convey respect and inclusion.

Acknowledgements

The CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group produced this work from 2018-2024.

Members included: Dorcas Hand (Chair 2017-2018), Avia Moore (Chair 2018-2020), Diane Silver (Chair 2020-2024), Katy Heine, Nikki Herbst, Frannie Marr, Pam Paulson, JoLaine Jones-Pokorney, Chris Weiler, Chris Ricciotti (community member), Susie Lorand, Darlene Underwood, Juliette Webb, Marni Rachmiel, John Seto, Olivia Barry (community member).

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**Part
1A**

Creating a Statement of Community Values

Acknowledgements

Produced by members of the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand, Olivia Barry, Dorcas Hand, Chris Weiler. Published March 2024.

Overview

This set of documents provides guidance for local leaders to build their own statement of values.

Along with mission and vision statements, community values are the foundation for your group. Mission and vision are **what** you do; values are the reason for your mission in the first place (**why** you exist).

Mission and vision often get crafted first. Founders begin with an idea of what they want to do, and it's a big task to get that overview mapped out. But once a clear vision for the group or event has been written, it is worth taking a step back to articulate the underlying values which the mission and vision reflect. Mission, vision, and values are the justification for your decisions and they drive your policies and procedures—**how** you do what you do.

Note: CDSS has a number of additional resources related to **mission and vision**. Visit cdss.org/portal. Especially use the filters “organizers” and “starting up.”

The intent of this guide is to save local leaders the work of finding and sifting through dozens of sample documents from other communities, searching for language that describes their values. We have attempted to do that work for you. If you copy and paste the sample language directly, we encourage you to cite the original source. Or, feel free to use the given examples as a starting point and adapt it further as you create your own values statement.

Processes for developing a values statement

1. Possible models of governance and decision-making

Before beginning to craft a statement of values, it is important to identify the model of governance your organization uses, i.e., who will be creating the guiding documents of values, mission, and vision? This will help you move forward in choosing a process for establishing the values that will guide all your other policies. Being intentional about this is actually a big part of the process of documenting your values.

To aid in this choice, please refer to the next document in [Part 1B of the toolkit, Possible models of governance or decision-making](#).

Before beginning to work on your values statement, discuss the process you will use. This document presents our suggested process, though you may choose to adapt it. Make sure that everyone with decision-making authority has reviewed the process, has had the opportunity to suggest changes, and agrees to it. That sets the stage for buy-in when the process is used to reach decisions.

2. Brainstorm

Whichever model of decision-making you've chosen, gather those people together to brainstorm the values you believe underlie your mission and vision, and which guide the behavior you hope for at your events. It is important that all the individuals included in the chosen governance model are included (or at least, invited) to participate in this process. If anyone who will ultimately have approval authority is excluded from the process, they may not feel invested in the final statement and may derail final approval.

Remember that in brainstorming, no judgment should be expressed regarding any suggested ideas. All ideas should be documented. This might be a list on a flip chart during an in-person meeting, or a shared online document if meeting remotely, or a jamboard, or other online tools for gathering and organizing ideas.

3. Categorize and synthesize

Group similar values together and look for duplication, or nuances of a larger idea. Create “umbrella” categories or statements that summarize a group of similar ideas, or create a bulleted list, with nuances of a big idea indented underneath it. Try to eliminate repetition, but make sure the winnowing process follows your agreed-upon process for decision-making. (If you nix someone's idea without their agreement, it may create bad feelings that can derail final approval of the values statement).

4. Discuss and approve or set aside

For each item in the list, discuss the pros and cons of including it as a guiding value for your organization. Some things to consider:

- a. Is the item truly a value or is it a behavior? Values describe principles and priorities. They are conceptual in nature. They describe your purpose—**why** you have your mission and vision. Behavior **reflects** values, but behavior is not the value itself.
- b. Is the proposed value over-arching, applicable to the whole organization, or narrow and specific to a subset of goals, events, or people? For example, some organizations have values that guide everyone's behavior, and additional values that guide board member conduct and decision-making. Organize your ideas accordingly. If an idea seems particularly narrow, it might be set aside, or included elsewhere as a suggestion for participants, but not included as a core value.

As you discuss each item, use the agreed-upon process for deciding whether or not to keep it. This process is very important for final buy-in from all decision-makers.

5. Fine-tune and finalize

Once you have evaluated all the proposed ideas and identified the values you all agree on, try to make them as clear, direct, and succinct as possible. Consider taking a break from the list and returning to it in a few days, or at the next regular meeting, to fine-tune it with fresh energy. Decide the format you want for the final statement or document: a narrative in paragraph format, a bulleted list with an introductory statement, or something else.

At each step of this process, use your agreed-upon decision-making protocol to get approval before moving to the next step. In this way, approval of the statement should be smooth, with no surprises. Even so, be intentional in securing final approval for the document, whether by consensus, majority vote, or whatever you agreed upon at the beginning.

6. Publish and promote your organizational values

The values statement justifies the mission and vision, and guides the behavior of participants at your events or members of your organization. Make them readily available. Publish them on your website, with an easy-to-find link on the landing page. Have hard copies on display at events. Review them at the start of every meeting, and refer to them as business is being conducted. Whenever a new decision needs to be made, consider whether or not the choice aligns with your stated values.

General observations about values statements and tips for organizers

To reiterate:

- **What we do** = mission and vision statements
- **Why we do it** = values statement
 - values about the activity (for example, we value fun, friendship, tradition, creativity, etc.)
 - and**
 - meta-values about society (for example, we value equity, inclusiveness, acceptance, etc.)
- **How we do it** = code of conduct, courtesy & etiquette, and complaint procedures, based on the stated values.
- **Who decides** = model of governance and decision-making

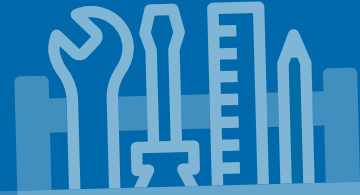
The way these fit together is well summarized in this set of tips from [Why Organizational Values Are So Awesome](#):

- **Distill values into observable behavior:** Don't be wishy-washy or esoteric with your values. Spell them out in human-being language, with behaviors that are easy to understand and carry out. Respect, for example, can mean so many different things to so many different people. "We respect everyone" doesn't mean anything unless you spell out specific behaviors.
- **Don't make it too complicated:** To me, respect may be best demonstrated by people washing their dishes instead of leaving them in the sink. Integrity may just mean you do [what] you say you're going to do and admit when you make mistakes. Don't complicate things.
- **Keep it visible and in everyone's mind:** Once you have your list of values, print it out, put it up on walls, have handouts for every event.
- **Use it for everything:** Your values are completely useless if they are only a list on your website. Find a way to integrate them into everything. Actually, find a way to base everything on them.
- **Discuss and adapt:** Your core values may not change often, but I find that specific behaviors under each value may change. That's OK. In fact, it's perfectly normal and even good for the organization to constantly evaluate behaviors and change them as appropriate. As new team members and leaders come along, values may sometimes change to incorporate their perspectives. This helps with ownership, which is very important. However, your board and staff may want to figure out which values/behaviors are non-negotiable.

Resources:

<https://nonprofitaf.com/2016/05/why-organizational-values-are-so-awesome-and-sexy/>

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-value-statement>



**Part
1B**

Possible Governance Models and Processes

Acknowledgements

Produced by members of the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand. Published March 2024.

Note for new and existing groups

It is important to recognize that existing groups have different needs and processes than newly forming ones. Board/committee leadership groups will function differently than single or small-team leadership.

The most important thing is to decide whether leaders are empowered to make decisions according to their own best judgment, or whether they are expected to represent the views of the members or participants.

Possible models of governance or decision-making

1) Benevolent dictatorship

- This model is often the default when an individual or small group takes the initiative to start a new event to carry out their particular vision. While they may be open to hearing feedback and suggestions, this model is based on not having to share decision-making power with potentially different priorities or preferences. These leaders may be willing to do more of the work themselves in order to maintain more control. Groups that start this way may evolve into shared leadership over time.
- This is also the model for an existing group that has a long-recognized leader.

II) Empowered board

- An elected leader or board is empowered to make decisions on behalf of the group without much (or any) consultation with the members. The leaders are expected to carry out the group's mission, not the preferences of the participants. If participants perceive that the leadership is not implementing the mission, they can elect new leaders, but the mission of the organization should not shift based on the whims of current participants.

Under either of these models, the benevolent dictator(s) or empowered board create guiding documents or governing policies and make other decisions themselves.

III) Direct democracy/town hall

- Decisions are made by the group, either through a consensus process or an agreed voting threshold. A facilitator or elected leader might lead discussion, but the actual decision-making is by the group as a whole.

Additional models for developing organizational structure initially, or for specific conflict resolution or problem-solving

IV) Community process

- This model is often used for an existing group that is creating guiding documents retroactively. Participants may have a general sense of shared values that have been lived for some time but have never been written down. A community process is used to identify and document these shared values.
- Alternatively, the community process may be used to clarify or change existing values. That is, there may be a feeling that the atmosphere of the group has slowly evolved to a point where some members feel it no longer reflects the sense of unspoken values which have been assumed, or which existed in the past. Existing groups may have a broad range of unspoken or assumed values, especially if the participants reflect some diversity. There could be some existing conflict about what the group's values are or should be.
- Under this model, participant input is sought and considered in crafting the statement of values. This can be done in several ways:

- **Real-time community meeting** or a series of community meetings (in-person or via teleconference), perhaps with a designated facilitator, who perhaps is from outside the group: This would involve a process of brainstorming what the group’s values are or should be, grouping ideas into categories, and then crafting comprehensive statements that articulate the expressed values. This process could take several meeting sessions, depending on the size and diversity of the group.
- **Participant survey:** Members’ views are collected regarding what they think the important values of the community are. Surveys may be conducted in several ways:
 - **Paper survey** at a regularly held event, usually multiple times over a designated time period so that ample opportunity is given to provide input
 - **Online survey** over the designated time period, which is publicized using a range of outreach tools—social media posts, email blasts, announcements and flyers at regular events, newsletter, etc.

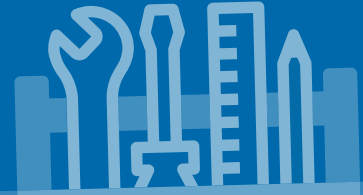
Survey input is then synthesized to create draft statements that articulate the expressed values. An iterative process of feedback and revision may be needed to fine-tune the statements into a final version that is accepted by the community, either by consensus or by an agreed voting process.

Note: To ensure buy-in for the final result, it is important to agree upon this process for final acceptance **before** the survey and drafting process begins. This meta-level process work is especially important when the group seems to have a range of assumed values that are in conflict. Deciding in advance whether acceptance will be by consensus, or majority vote, or 2/3 vote, etc., is important. If this process is not made clear in advance, there’s a risk that those who are unhappy with the outcome will feel that the process was unfair.

- Furthermore, when conflict exists that seems to stem from differing values, additional conflict resolution work may be needed. For example, suppose some folks want exciting advanced-level dancing (“we value a high-energy challenging environment”) and others want everyone-is-welcome energy (“we value an easy-going atmosphere”). Discussion may require “zooming out” to identify values everyone **can** agree on: “Some of us value ____ and others value _____, but we all value _____.” Through this process, shared values can be identified and a process may be developed for accommodating the range of specific preferences, for example, alternating programming or development of several separate series of events with distinct goals, all under the group umbrella. In some cases, if agreement cannot be reached, some individuals may choose to split off and create a new group with a different vision, driven by different values. This would likely be established through the benevolent dictator model (see above). The splintering of a large, diverse group into separate smaller groups with different goals is not a bad thing. On the contrary, it can be a healthy natural development and can result in greater richness for the geographic community as a whole.

V) Hybrid

- A hybrid of benevolent dictatorship and community process is a process in which input is sought from a subset of the participants—for instance, through a series of focus groups—and then the input is synthesized by the leader(s) to craft the final values statements. This process can be a good compromise of the community buy-in that is achieved through group process and the efficiency of decision-making by leadership.
- Focus group participants could be selected in one of several ways:
 - **Leadership invitation:** Leader(s) identify the participants who are most active, or who would likely respond. The benevolence of the dictator(s) is presumed, with trust that those invited will represent the breadth of interests in the community as a whole. This model is useful when there is little conflict, or even some apathy, as people are more likely to respond when invited personally. It is risky when strong conflict exists, as leaders would have to ensure that all stakeholders truly feel represented by the focus groups. Otherwise there will not be buy-in to the final statements, and the conflict will persist.
 - **Participant application:** Anyone would be invited to apply to participate in the focus groups, and leaders would select from among the applicants, taking care that all perceived subgroups are represented by those selected. This is useful when conflict is minimal and there is some interest in participating. It can help ensure that community voices are heard and those who most strongly want to participate can do so, while also keeping the group small and manageable for more efficient discussion.
 - **Participant initiative:** In this model, the input session would be open to anyone, and several sessions could be conducted. This can be useful if some conflict exists, especially if it is considered minor. Separate focus groups could be held with different subgroups to help minimize debate during discussion and enable leaders to collect the particular views of each group. Leaders would then synthesize all views to craft the final values statements. This is a compromise model that helps all groups feel that they have been heard, but ultimately leaves the final decisions in the hands of the (presumably benevolent) dictator(s).
- None of these hybrid models is likely to be effective if there is **strong** conflict. The full community process model would likely be needed to ensure that everyone feels fully heard and that ultimately, everyone will accept the resulting values statement and the policies and procedures that will be derived from it.



Part
1C

Examples of Community Values Statements

Acknowledgements

Compiled by members of the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand, Olivia Barry, Dorcas Hand, Chris Weiler, John Seto. Published March 2024.

Thank you to the groups and organizations whose values statements are included here as examples for creating your own. For permission to use any of these statements in other ways, please contact the organizations directly.

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Values can be stated simply, as one word or a short phrase. They also may need a bit of context or description—the “why” and possibly some of the “how” this value applies to this community.

Examples of values statements from CDSS Affiliates and similar music/song/dance organizations from across North America

(listed from simpler to more detailed)

Note: Many of these examples are a combination of value descriptions and mission statements or value descriptions and behavior expectations.

In this toolkit, we have separated these into discrete documents: Part 1 is the statement of values, Part 2 is code of conduct, and Part 3 is guidelines for courtesy and etiquette. Our code of conduct and courtesy and etiquette guidelines are more detailed. We have selected these examples for you to consider how to write your own values statement. You will notice that some are very concise, while others are longer and include elements of other components (code of conduct, etiquette). Each group will need to make local decisions about whether to write a statement focused on values alone, or to intertwine these various components.

John C. Campbell Folk School (Brasstown, NC)

<https://www.folkschool.org/>

Statement:

- **Joy**—We bring originality, creativity and passion to all endeavors—we sing behind the plow.
- **Kindness**—We treat everyone with respect, humility and warmth.
- **Stewardship**—We honor the traditions and spirit of the Folk School as we guide its evolution and preserve it for the future.
- **Non-competitive**—We support and affirm each other in lifelong growth.

Young Tradition Vermont

<https://youngtraditionvermont.org/>

Statement (as part of an annual impact report):

The mission of Young Tradition Vermont is to ensure that children, youth, and young adults have opportunities to be inspired by, learn about, and perform traditional music and dance, and to use that music and dance to serve communities in Vermont and places participants visit.



We are centered by core values: diversity, inclusion and equity; sustainability; affordability; high quality; and collaboration.

Madison Contra Dance Co-Op (Madison, WI)

<https://www.madisoncontra.org/values-and-guidelines>

Statement:

The Madison Contra Dance Co-op welcomes people of all ages, genders, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, religious affiliations, abilities, and financial means to join us in carrying on the tradition of contra dancing to live music in Madison. We strive to cultivate a lively community where every dancer can find joy, respect, and safety. As such, we encourage dancers to practice good communication, be mindful of their contact with their fellow dancers, and dance with whoever is coming at them in a way that increases the joy of all involved. We are all here to have a fun time and create positive energy together, and we welcome all to join us in sustaining this wonderful dancing tradition!

Queen City Contrás (Burlington, VT)

<https://queencitycontras.com/about-qcc>

Statement:

Our Mission & Community Values:

Queen City Contrás is a Burlington, Vermont-based non-profit that provides fun, high-quality contra dancing with live music and calling to sustain a longstanding New England tradition. We are members of the Country Song & Dance Society (CDSS). The following values are shared by the QCC Organizing Committee:

- Contra dancing is a fun, social, and healthy activity that is open to individuals and families of all ages.
- The QCC dance is welcoming to beginners and is attractive to more experienced dancers.
- Contra dancing builds and maintains community among dancers and performers.

Asheville English Country Dance/Old Farmer's Ball (Asheville, NC)

<https://oldfarmersball.com/english-country-dance/>

Statement:

Old Farmer's Ball Values

- **Welcoming** – A safe and inviting space for dancers, musicians, and callers.
- **Community** – We value respect, inclusiveness, diversity, consent, and multigenerational interaction.
- **Ownership** – Volunteer investment in the organization.
- **Joy/Smiles** – Presence in the moment.
- **Development** – Artistic growth and skill of callers, musicians, and dancers.

Board Values

- Transparency
- Leadership
- Activism
- Ownership
- Integrity

Portland Intown Contra Dance (Portland, ME)

<https://portlandintowncontradance.com/>

Statement:

Portland Intown Contra Dance is a dynamic, growing community of people from Portland, ME and elsewhere who really love to dance and really like spending time with each other. We're creative, zesty, welcoming, loving, respectful, and delightful. We're tons of volunteers, a handful of core organizers, and a whole network of people we impact by spreading our joy.

We take our values seriously and have fun with just about everything else. Here's what we're up to:

- Our contra dance strives to be welcoming to all people.
- We create a safe and respectful space together, encouraging healthy self-expression and high quality communication.
- We cherish our local dance community and act in ways that nourish it.
- As members of the broader Maine and national contra dance communities, we honor our roles in preserving and evolving contra traditions.
- And we have fun. Lots and lots of fun.

More found at <https://portlandintowncontradance.com/picd>



BIDA (Boston Intergenerational Dance Advocates) (Boston, MA)

<https://www.bidadance.org/about>

Statement:

BIDA is a Boston-area group dedicated to promoting involvement in traditional dance and connecting generations by:

- Encouraging dance musicians and callers
- Promoting intergenerational dancing
- Fostering growth in the traditional dance community
- Providing opportunities and resources for dance organizing
- Providing financially and logistically accessible events
- Providing educational and mentoring opportunities
- Building community through social events

BIDA was formed in the fall of 2008 in an effort to fill a niche not served by other dance groups in the area. While Boston had and still has a rich and vibrant traditional dance scene, there was not as much intergenerational interaction as there could be in many of the Boston dance communities. BIDA's founders hoped to create an organization which would strengthen community ties and provide opportunities for dancers, musicians, callers, and dance organizers to share knowledge and energy between generations.

Note: This is a combination of mission, programming, and values.

Downtown Amherst Contra Dance (Amherst, MA)

Statement:

We aim to have participants fulfill our values at our events:

- **Inclusion:** We include attendees of all genders, races, sexual orientations, bodies, abilities, ages, and backgrounds. We actively work to offer events that create inclusive spaces and that do not present barriers to participation.
- **Safety:** We strive to create an environment where attendees can feel safe to express themselves and to have fun. Dancing should be done with consciousness of physical safety of self and other attendees.
- **Respect:** We respect each other as people. We believe that all attendees have something valuable to offer. We trust that our attendees will show this respect.

- **Fun:** We want to have fun! We love contra dancing as an art form, social experience, and recreational activity. We want to share that love with others, and we want to connect everyone with the joy of contra dancing.
- **Supporting new attendees:** We want the Downtown Amherst Contra Dance to be a place where new attendees can discover and experience contra dancing. We offer lessons, dances that are easy to learn, and we encourage experienced dancers to help new attendees learn.
- **Supporting students:** We aim to introduce students to contra dancing. We aim to foster connections between students and the broader community of local dancers. We aim to support local student contra dance groups.
- **Supporting local performers:** We recognize the amazing music being created by local folk musicians and wish to provide opportunities for growth of local musicians and callers.

Arden Contra Dance (Arden, DE)

<https://ardenclub.org/folk-gild/>

Statement:

Our Arden Contra Dance Community is:

Inclusive: We ask a variety of people to dance; we leave space for others to ask us and do not book ahead; we respect that anyone can dance any role and refrain from gendered role comments; we share our pronouns as we are comfortable and use other's pronouns appropriately, and ask when unsure; we accommodate the individual needs of all dancers; we avoid wearing fragrances.

Welcoming: We dance with whoever is coming at us, we respect personal boundaries and comfort; we give ourselves and each other grace when we mess up, and we learn from those mistakes; we are kind and respectful to all.

Safe: We prioritize consent and communication and ask our partners about extra flourishes; we do not shove or yell at people if we think they are in the wrong place; we speak up or ask for help when something is uncomfortable or unsafe; we understand that anyone can say no at any time without explanation; we know that a lead into a flourish is an invitation and cannot be forceful; we stay aware of our partner, hands four, set, and the entire hall while dancing.

If you have concerns about how we are living up to these agreements and you don't feel comfortable addressing them yourself, please speak to an organizer, leave a feedback comment, or email us at ardencontra@gmail.com.

* Thanks to the Hands Across community of CFOOTMAD for this document.

Note: This example combines a list of values with clear statements about how they should guide behavior and what to do when they don't—a combination of values, code of conduct, and etiquette guidelines.

Fiddle Orchestra of Western Massachusetts

<https://fiddlewesternmass.com/>

Statement:

The Fiddle Orchestra of Western Massachusetts is an amateur orchestra made up mostly of fiddle players but also players of other instruments.

- Not for profit
- Professionally facilitated and conducted
- Focus on learning
- Focus on achieving a cohesive sound and cohesive spirit
- Strive to play without sheet music at our concerts with the caveat that “by ear” is not suitable for everyone for a variety of reasons
- All members respect and help cultivate the FOWM culture
- Inclusiveness – We welcome, respect, and show kindness and friendliness to anyone who joins FOWM, regardless of their musical skill and background, gender, sexual orientation, age, race or ethnicity, culture, geographic location, etc.
- Supportiveness – We help each other grow musically by playing together and through respectful, positive, open conversation and problem solving. All of us, from beginners to professional musicians, are learners.
- Open-mindedness – We are open to playing and trying different kinds of music and participating in different orchestral roles as presented to us by our Director.
- Sharing – We welcome appropriate ways to share with the community, such as by putting on an end-of-season concert, playing at community events, and allowing visitors to observe our practice sessions.

Syracuse Country Dancers

<https://syracusecountrydancers.org/>

Statement:

Who We Are

Hello! Welcome to our dance community! The Syracuse Country Dancers is a group of diverse people who are brought together by our love of dance, music, and community. We strive to be welcoming to all and encourage people of all ages and experience levels to join us for our dance events.

We teach and promote safe and enjoyable dancing, and we ask that our dancers be respectful of each other, the caller, and the band. Some ways we do that are by asking each other to dance, clapping for the band, listening to the caller, and asking about and respecting each others' dancing preferences (e.g. Would you like to twirl? How fast do you like to swing?).

Syracuse Country Dancers' events are alcohol and drug-free, and we aspire for our dances to be open and comfortable to everyone. Please be aware of and respect others' personal boundaries and personal space. We do not tolerate harassment or discrimination in any form.

If you have any concerns, please let us (any of the board members) know! We are always eager to improve our events in any ways that we can.

Happy Dancing!

Note: This is another combined statement of values and behavior guidelines.

LCFD (Lavender Country and Folk Dancers)

<https://www.lcfd.org/code-of-conduct.html>

Statement:

Values and Conduct

As an explicitly LGBTQIA+ dance community, we hold the following values and expect this corresponding conduct:

Value: Community Mindedness

Conduct:

- Be inclusive and dance with people regardless of gender, age, gender identity, race, health status, national origin, relationship status, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and experience levels, etc.

- Avoid assuming anyone's gender, pronouns, or identity. Refer to people in non-gendered ways until you can determine the language and pronouns individuals want used for and about them.
- Be respectful to fellow dancers, callers, volunteers, dance organizers, etc. Recognize that our dance events take a great deal of effort from many individuals, and consider pitching in to help.
- Ask if people want feedback before giving it (except relating to others not hurting you).
- Change partners each dance and try to avoid booking ahead.
- Dance with the whole line and hall, not just your partner.

Value: Consent and Communication

Conduct:

- Acknowledge that consent is situational and can be revoked at any time.
- Realize that hugging or other intimate behavior is never obligated. Physical touch requires enthusiastic consent.
- Recognize that eye contact is a part of our dance culture but is optional for all.
- Communicate with partners about role preference, injuries, sensitivities, twirls, flirting, etc.
- Understand that if you have asked someone to dance and they decline, you are encouraged not to ask that same person to dance again during the same dance session.
- Ask anyone to dance and when asked, politely accept or refuse. No one is obligated to dance with anyone else, and declining to dance with one person does not preclude dancing that dance with someone else.

Value: Physical Safety

Conduct:

- Dance to avoid injuring others, for example by using open hand holds, holding your own weight, stopping when someone asks to stop or indicates that they are in pain.
- Offer flourishes, but only complete them if the other dancer accepts the flourish. Dancers who are unsure of how to accept or decline flourishes, or how to interpret others' responses, are encouraged to ask an organizer for advice or seek verbal consent from other dancers before flourishing.
- Be responsible for your own body and clothing on the dance floor and avoid bumping or stepping on other dancers. Take special care when the hall is crowded, and be observant of others who may have special physical needs or limitations.
- Be conscious of scent sensitivities. LCFD events and weekends are fragrance-free, and you may be asked to leave an event if your perfume, scented deodorant, scented shampoo, etc. poses a health risk.

Note: This is a more detailed combination of a values statement with code of conduct/behavioral guidelines.

Ashland Country Dancers (branch of *The Heather and The Rose Country Dancers*) (Ashland, OR)

<http://www.heatherandrose.org/about.shtml>

Statement:

Note: Not an official statement of core values; however, our website is pretty clear about what we value and how our dance works:

The Heather and The Rose Country Dancers (H&R) is a statewide network of dance groups in Oregon which teach both English and Scottish Country Dance and use global / positional terminology for teaching. The H&R started around 1981 with informal meetings of volunteer teachers from around the state who had a similar philosophy informed by the teaching of Carl Wittman (1943-1986). H&R was incorporated in 1982 and got its 501(c)(3) status in 1986. The Eugene group had its first Harvest Ball in 1978 and the Ashland group's first Spring Ball was 1981. H&R has presented weekend dance camps since 1981.

Our philosophy is based upon community and inclusiveness. The emphasis is the whole of the dance community and the whole of the dance. We promote community and inclusiveness by teaching with global/positional terminology, by not using gender identity to determine who dances on what side or with whom, and by forming sets as individuals rather than as couples. At our dances you get to dance with everyone from any position.

Global terminology uses teaching language that is global and geography-based and the teaching/calling does not refer to gender roles in any way. Rather, we use language that refers to people's positions within the dance. This promotes community spirit by being inclusive—not discriminating and removing barriers. It has the added benefit of simplicity and clarity, usually requiring fewer words when teaching.

The way we teach supports the way we dance. We don't worry about who is on what side or dancing with whom. When you come to our dances, you will find everyone dancing with everyone else on either side of the dance, regardless of gender identity or expression. We feel this builds a stronger community—you get to know and dance with more people and everyone has an equal chance to dance. It is also more welcoming to LGBTQ+ folks.

Added benefits include dancers learning the whole dance rather than just one side of it (they become better dancers by learning all aspects of the dance, knowing the whole pattern).

Forming sets as individuals rather than couples adds to the feeling of inclusiveness. Everyone in the room is a potential dance partner. Rather than dancers having to find a partner for the next dance, they simply stay on the floor or come to the floor as individuals, sure that someone will come to stand

opposite them. This manner of forming sets does not preclude dancing with a particular person on occasion, though couples are encouraged to come in at the bottom rather than leave holes in a longways.

When forming sets, we call for the number of additional dancers needed rather than calling for couples. Forming sets as individuals removes another barrier to joining the dance, reducing the competitiveness and scrambling for a partner (as well as the anxiety of asking or waiting to be asked) and enhancing accessibility and the sense of community.

Note: This example combines a statement of what is valued with detailed description of how that value is practiced.

Bay Area Country Dance Society (BACDS)

https://www.bacds.org/organization/board/policies/social_contract/

Social Contract:

The Bay Area Country Dance Society (BACDS) is an association of people who gather for social dancing. As a community, we wish to state the policy of the group and its expectation of acceptable behavior.

We wish to cultivate an atmosphere of fun and good will. Dancers expect our dance events to be a safe place, free from harmful influences. This is why we have maintained a policy of sober dancing in a smoke-free environment. Also, some of our dancers are hypersensitive or allergic to highly scented products such as perfume, after-shave, cologne, etc. Please do not wear these types of scented products to a dance. Personal hygiene is very important during this activity. A clean person and clean clothing are expected of everyone. Shoes should be appropriate & not damage the floor.

Furthermore, dance etiquette and our group policy about personal conduct requires dancers to act respectfully and peacefully toward all others they encounter at the dance.

Women and men both may ask for partners. While we hope that everyone is open to dance with a variety of other dancers, each dancer may decline a request to dance. We hope that is done tactfully and kindly. And we hope that the asker can let it go at that.

Because country dancing is a contact activity, we expect everyone to consider both the safety of others and the limits of reasonable personal space.

We reserve the right to expel from the dance anyone who does not choose to act within the limits of good behavior. Any warning received about unacceptable behavior needs to be taken seriously. Rough or inappropriate touching is not acceptable, nor is foul or abusive language, or the appearance of inebriety.

If we feel it necessary to expel a person, it will be at the discretion of the BACDS Board whether or not to allow them to return.

It is our fervent hope that all dancers will feel welcome and safe. We wish for everyone to have a good time and practice good behavior.

Adults are responsible for any children they bring to the dance.

(Adapted by permission from a document produced by the Chico Country Dance Society.)

Note: This is identified as a social contract, not a statement of values, but values are embedded along with behavior expectations.

Examples of values statements from music/song/dance/arts organizations that are not CDSS affiliates or are substantively different from our groups

Threshold Choir International

<https://thresholdchoir.org/our-values/>

We are committed to these values when we serve our clients. We recognize the privilege of being invited into our clients' lives at a significant threshold and honor that privilege by maintaining these values at every level of the Threshold Choir organization:

- We value honesty, sincerity, care, and respect in all our interactions.
- We value each person's own life path, choices, and experiences.
- We value the transformative power of love and the healing power of presence.
- We value the importance of compassion and kindness.
- We value the benefit of listening with more than just our ears.
- We value caring for ourselves while being of service to others.
- We value diversity with respect to spiritual paths, cultures, and abilities without respect to age, race, color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or physical ability.
- We value the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of all people.
- We value the sanctity of all life.
- We value the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination.

We know that we are giving something extremely precious when we sing at the bedside of someone on the threshold. We are aligning our integrity, our gratitude, and our deep generosity with our voices and dancing in the balance

- of humility and confidence,
- of service and self-healing,
- of one singer's voice blended with others,
- of following the breath of our "traveler" with the blessing of our own breath,
- of the stranger bringing grace to an intimate moment.

We are making kindness audible.

Village Harmony

<https://www.villageharmony.org/>

Village Harmony, Inc. is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization based in central Vermont with activities around the world welcoming singers of all colors, creeds, ethnicities, nationalities, gender orientations & socio-economic backgrounds. Our focus is on deep exploration of harmony singing styles from traditional cultures throughout the world. We view this as an important aspect of building bridges between different cultures and communities.

Note: This is a mission statement and values statement, combined.

Folk Alliance

<https://folk.org/about/>

Mission:

Folk Alliance International's mission is to serve, strengthen, and engage the global folk music community through preservation, presentation, and promotion.

FAI defines folk broadly as "the music of the people" (reflective of any community they are from), and programs a diverse array of subgenres including, but not limited to Appalachian, Americana, Blues, Bluegrass, Celtic, Cajun, Global Roots, Hip-Hop, Old-Time, Singer-Songwriter, Spoken Word, Traditional, Zydeco, and various fusions.

Vision:

- Advocate for the folk music community
- Thoughtful, intentional growth
- Be a respected organization within the music industry
- Continue to produce high profile, meaningful events

Values:

FAI values diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, strives to ensure gender parity in all its programming, celebrates multiple languages and cultures, and actively welcomes participation from marginalized, disenfranchised, and underrepresented communities.

We believe that greater diversity throughout the organization allows Folk Alliance International to:

Build a more creative and compassionate community. Folk music has historically been inclusionary at all levels and by nature brings community together. It has often been a part of movements for social and political change.

Spur awareness of other cultures and perspectives. We value sharing knowledge and conducting ourselves in a respectful manner. Interaction with a broader membership base introduces us to traditions from different countries and regions, along with perspectives of sub-communities within Folk Alliance International. Openness to and acceptance of these varied interests and perspectives will lead to greater inclusion and participation.

Provide enhanced opportunities for the organization and members. These additional viewpoints and communities will support our intrinsic value by fostering international and multi-cultural understanding, allowing FAI to make a greater impact in the music community and the world at large.

We also believe that bringing greater diversity to the organization will challenge our assumptions while revealing our similarities. It will have indefinable, intangible, and unpredictable effects. The costs of international expansion are worthwhile and of value.

Notes:

DH: This one most directly addresses questions of cultural diversity.

DS: This is an interesting example because it contains a clear statement of values, plus extensive justification for the particular value of diversity. The justifications in turn contain additional values, but they are implied rather than explicit, as in the Threshold Choir example, above.

National Folk Organization

<https://nfo-usa.com/>

We invite you to become part of our NFO family—dance professionals and practitioners, from across the nation, who share a love for folk dance and all things connected—the people, the cultural arts and traditions, and the music. Ours is a simple passion for supporting and advancing folk dance and associated events in our local communities across the United States. We love dancing—and we love the people who do it.

Note: This is a mission and vision statement combined.

Examples from well-respected national non-profit organizations (non-music/song/dance)

(listed in alphabetical order)

American Red Cross

<https://www.redcross.org/about-us/careers/culture.html>

No matter what our role within the organization, Red Cross employees work toward a common goal: supporting our mission. We strive to follow key values—known as the “Five Cs”—that guide our actions, every day.

- **Compassionate:** We are dedicated to improving the lives of those we serve and to treating each other with care and respect.
- **Collaborative:** We work together as One Red Cross family, in partnership with other organizations, and always embrace diversity and inclusiveness.
- **Creative:** We seek new ideas, are open to change and always look for better ways to serve those in need.
- **Credible:** We act with integrity, are transparent guardians of the public trust and honor our promises
- **Committed:** We hold ourselves accountable for defining and meeting clear objectives, delivering on our mission and carefully stewarding our donor funds.

For additional, more detailed values, see

<https://www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/mission-and-values.html>

Care

<https://www.care.org/about-us/mission-vision/>

Our Values

- **Transformation**

We believe in urgent action, innovation, and the necessity of transformation—within the world and our own organization.

- **Integrity**

We are accountable to the people and partners we humbly serve, transparently sharing our [results](#), [stories](#), and lessons.

- **Diversity**

We know that by embracing differences, actively including a variety of voices, and joining together we can solve the world's most complex problems.

- **Excellence**

We challenge ourselves to the highest level of learning and performance, tapping the best of the human spirit to create impact.

- **Equality**

We believe in the equal value of every human being and the importance of respecting and honoring each individual; we know that change happens through people.

- **Our Core Values Commitment**

This [Core Values Commitment](#) describes who we are, what we do, and how we do it. It reflects our Core Values of **Transformation, Integrity, Diversity, Excellence, and Equality**, which serve as a foundation for all that we do.

Outward Bound

<https://www.outwardbound.org/about-outward-bound/philosophy/values/>

We teach to and work by these values:

- **Compassion**

Demonstrating concern and acting with a spirit of respect and generosity in service to others

- **Integrity**

Acting with honesty, being accountable for your decisions and actions.

- **Excellence**

Being your best self, pursuing craftsmanship in your actions, and living a healthy and balanced life.

- **Inclusion and Diversity**

Valuing and working to create communities representative of our society that support and respect differences.

ALDEA: Advancing Local Development through Empowerment and Action

Excerpt from <https://aldeaguatemala.org/who-we-are/>

Our Principles and Basic Values...

- **Partnership with Communities**

Working in partnership with Mayan communities in the Guatemalan highlands toward their own goals is an important pillar of ALDEA–ABPD’s work.

- **Community Empowerment and Mobilization**

The mobilization and empowerment of the entire community is an important aspect of all ALDEA–ABPD’s programs and approaches.

- **Strategic Alliances**

An essential part of the approach is for ALDEA–ABPD and the communities and their local development committees (known by their Spanish acronym COCODES) to form strategic alliances with a range of actors including municipalities, national governmental entities, and other NGOs working in the area that can complement our work.

- **Evidence-Based Interventions**

ALDEA–ABPD’s work is evidence-based, drawing on documented national and international research about what works best. This also means that we will periodically document and evaluate our work.

- **Sustainable Development**

ALDEA–ABPD strives to ensure that development activities are sustainable and cost-effective.

- **Learning and Knowledge**

ALDEA and ABPD are learning organizations. We will develop and test innovative approaches with our partner communities and continually engage in evaluation processes to determine what works. We will phase in new ideas, taking into consideration the conditions in each community, and basing our support on what is happening on the ground.

America's Charities

<https://www.charities.org/>

Core Values

The success of America's Charities is derived from an engaged board of directors and a dedicated staff. Together, our work is guided by these core values:

- **Culture of Collaboration and Excellence:**

By passionately working together with all stakeholders, we challenge each other to achieve the highest levels of professional excellence.

- **Dedication to Diversity and Integrity:**

Embracing diversity and delivering the utmost value to our stakeholders, we believe integrity is the foundation of our individual and collective actions that drives an organization of which we are proud.

- **Commitment to Engagement and Connectivity:**

With an innovative and empowering spirit, we engage all stakeholders, and the greater society at large, through solutions and ideas that shape social responsibility trends and advance sustainable, effective philanthropy.

USO

Many USO locals have similar core values; this one is from central Virginia:

<https://hrcv.uso.org/about/core-values>

USOHRCV Core Values

The USOHRCV core values are recognized as the foundation of our culture, our brand and our operating principles. All USOHRCV employees and volunteers, as ambassadors of our mission, are expected to conduct themselves by these eight core values every day. Those values encompass: Mission First, Do the Right Thing, Respect, Excellence, Collaboration, Accountability, Gratitude, and Innovation.

Mission First: The troops' needs and interests are our top priority. Our decisions are based on what is best for the troops and their families, and we strive to inspire support for our service men and women. We act in the best interest of sustained achievement of the USOHRCV mission.

Do the Right Thing: Our actions and intentions reflect and reinforce the highest moral and ethical standards even if they involve risk or conflict. We demonstrate the courage to present and hear the truth in an appropriate manner and take personal responsibility to ensure our troops and their families receive the support they deserve.

Respect: We recognize and credit the contributions of others and are sensitive to their motivations and feelings. We treat people with dignity and show patience, tolerance, and concern for all. We act with humility and are mindful of the demands we make on others, and strive to be responsive to their requests.

Excellence: Excellence is our goal in everything we do. We strive to exceed expectations and continuously improve processes, programs and services. We set the standard for other organizations and lead by example.

Collaboration: We build strong, mutually beneficial relationships. We involve others in our plans and decisions, maintain a positive and inclusive work environment and make optimum use of the inputs of others. We provide candid, constructive feedback in the interest of improving operations, programs and services. We encourage, recognize and celebrate the success of all people and organizations that provide quality support to troops and their families.

Accountability: We honor our commitments and are good stewards of USOHRCV resources. We take responsibility for our actions, admit mistakes and build trust by being honest, responsive and consistent. We work with a sense of urgency to fulfill the USOHRCV mission.

Gratitude: We maintain a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation toward those we support and those who provide support. We embrace and encourage a spirit of volunteerism.

Innovation: Our agile and adaptable work environment allows us to find better ways to perform work and provide services and support. We are flexible and proactive and always encourage original thinking.

The Sierra Club

<https://www.sierraclub.org/>

To explore, enjoy and protect the planet. To practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives.

Additional national non-profit resources

- **Examples of Nonprofit Organization Core Values** (Updated August 11, 2020)
<https://smallbusiness.chron.com/examples-nonprofit-organization-core-values-62283.html>
This is a summary article affirming the utility of having a statement of values
 - **Board Source: Vision, Mission, Core Values**
<https://boardsource.org/about/vision-mission-core-values/>
This site contains examples of mission, vision and values statements of Board Source as an organization, plus it's a good resource for non-profits on how to manage your board and your organization.
 - **NonProfit Next: Mission, Vision, Values**
https://www.nonprofitnext.org/sites/default/files/resource_library/mission_vision_values_statements_rf.pdf
Additional overview of mission, vision and values statements, with national examples
 - **Forbes: The Three Core Values Every Nonprofit Leader Needs To Excel**
(Respect, Responsibility, Resiliency)
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2017/12/04/the-three-core-values-every-nonprofit-leader-needs-to-excel>
-

Additional ideas for music/dance/song values

- Promoting intergenerational activities that involve traditional singing, dancing, and music making
- Ensuring safety for participants
- Inclusivity: we welcome participation regardless of ability, skill, race, color, sexual identity, ...
- Participation in singing, dancing, making music
- Making everyone feel comfortable singing/dancing/making music, even when people are watching (as opposed to “dance as if no one is watching”). No shaming, no judging; just affirming.
- Presenting an affordable recreational activity
- Balance between preserving tradition and nurturing a living art form, supporting innovation
- Providing educational opportunities in traditional music/song/dance
- Building community—more than just having fun together, more than just a transactional activity; building a network for mutual support at our activities and beyond them
- We value fairness and due process for all when addressing conflicts or issues
- We value justice in the spirit of growth and healing, rather than punishment
 - *Note:* the last two values on this list support complaint procedures, which are a separate toolkit piece

Not all music, dance and song groups will align with all of the values listed above. On the contrary, there may be groups whose vision is intentionally exclusionary. For example, if a group formed to provide a challenge-dance opportunity, then some level of dance-skill might be one of the values, and total inclusion might not be.

Similarly, perhaps a community band is formed to provide an alternative to an existing one, for more advanced players who really want to play in a tight, disciplined band, as opposed to an anything-goes environment of an open band that emphasizes being welcoming to absolutely everyone. The advanced band might define a certain skill threshold as a value, or might define those qualities of discipline or “tightness” as values. Those values would then support choices regarding who is welcomed and who is referred to other opportunities that are a better match. A dance event whose mission is techno or alt- or fusion-contra might have creativity or continuing evolution of the living art form as values, and not adherence to tradition.

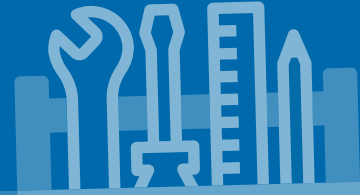
Values Glossary—summarized from all of the above

Here are examples of words for values that you might consider including. As you consider them, think about how you would put them into action. How will you embody your values? What would it look like if a value is “broken”?

For example, inclusivity is a value you might consider. What aspects of inclusivity are important to your community: gender, economic, abilities, age, body type, in-group, sensory differences, etc.?

In your community discussions, look at **why** these aspects of inclusivity matter to you, and **how** you will demonstrate the value in practical ways. The statement of the why and how might not be included in the values statement, but they do need to be discussed in the decision process.

<i>Affordable</i>	<i>Friendly</i>	<i>Sharing</i>	<i>Transparency</i>
<i>Community</i>	<i>Fun</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Integrity</i>
<i>Fellowship</i>	<i>Inclusive</i>	<i>Stewardship</i>	<i>Compassion</i>
<i>Belonging</i>	<i>Joy</i>	<i>Supportive</i>	<i>Fairness</i>
<i>Consent-based</i>	<i>Kindness</i>	<i>Sustainable</i>	<i>Justice</i>
<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Respectful</i>	<i>Tradition/Preservation</i>	<i>Camaraderie</i>
<i>Diversity</i>	<i>Safety</i>	<i>Welcoming</i>	



**Part
2**

Code of Conduct

Acknowledgements

Produced by members of the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand. Published March 2024.

A code of conduct codifies behavioral expectations, specifies what behavior will not be tolerated, and outlines what the consequences will be for infractions.

We have separated **suggested** behavior guidelines (norms and culture) under the topic of courtesy and etiquette (Part 3).

We distinguish between them in terms of absolutism. Courtesy and etiquette covers the broad gray area(s) of behaviors—issues for which different individuals have different levels of tolerance and probably interpret particular behaviors differently. These are the behaviors for which education, training, awareness, and support are the recommended first steps, and banning someone from an event would only be a final resort after other interventions have been exhausted.

In contrast, a code of conduct, as presented in this toolkit, is the set of absolute requirements for which there should be no differences in personal understandings or tolerances, and which are grounds for immediate strong response, including banning someone from future participation.

Both sets of policies, code of conduct and courtesy and etiquette guidelines, are policy documents (not bylaws), based on community values.

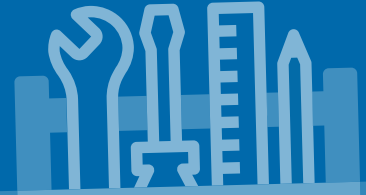
A courtesy and etiquette guide is actually the more difficult set of policies or guidelines to craft, and covers most of the behavioral issues that dance organizers face.

Many dance communities combine code of conduct (non-negotiable behavior requirements) with courtesy and etiquette guidelines. It is your choice whether to address these in one set of policies or two.

Rather than create a tailored writing guide for crafting a code of conduct for dance or music groups, we recommend [How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports](#) by Valerie Aurora and Mary Gardiner, offered by Frame Shift Consulting. This free ebook includes “what to include in a code of conduct (and what to leave out)” and is aimed at voluntary communities (as distinct from workplaces or government contexts). We felt no need to reinvent the wheel. It also includes great detail on responding to reports. We repeat our recommendation of this book in Part 4: Complaint Procedures.

Since most dance communities combine courtesy and etiquette guidelines with code of conduct policies, the only sample language we found for code of conduct policies that seem absolute in nature are from the Old Farmer’s Ball (Asheville, NC) behavior guidelines from the early 2000s. Their language was adapted in turn from, and credit cited to, the Philadelphia Thursday Night contra dance at that time. Both groups have since updated their policies to be more comprehensive, and are linked under Parts 3 and 4 of this toolkit.

Old OFB language: “while occasional brushes or accidental incidents may occur innocently, a pattern of repeated ‘accidents’ is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.”



**Part
3**

Courtesy & Etiquette Guidelines (AKA Shaping Culture)

Create Your Own Courtesy and Etiquette Guidelines

This framework provides example language for local leaders to choose from as they build their own courtesy and etiquette guidelines.

The intent of the toolkit is to save local leaders the work of sifting through dozens of sample documents from other communities, searching for language that reflects their values and meets the needs of their community. We have attempted to do that work for you.

For each topic listed, several text examples are provided. Many of these are adapted from existing culture and etiquette documents used by various communities across the country. Sources are credited at the end of this document.

The examples provided have variations in tone and language. These examples illustrate how different communities have said relatively the same thing, but with slightly different nuances. For this reason, there is some repetition. You may copy and paste the sample language directly, or adapt it further as you create your own document.

In addition, if you wish to see full samples of similar documents used in other communities, contact resources@cdss.org.

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This serves as a potential outline for creating your own document that can help guide your community.

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Definitions for the following terms are included in the [Introduction](#) to this toolkit:

- **Safety** • **Respect** • **Inclusion**
- **Courtesy** • **Etiquette**

Courtesy and Etiquette Guidelines

Introductory Language

- Everyone plays a role in building community—dancers, organizers, musicians, leaders, spectators, and more! In order to provide a welcoming environment, driven by inclusivity and the opportunity to leave a meaningful impact on the people brought together, we depend on you to support this goal.
 - The dance community tries to be welcoming to all and relies on everyone to support that goal.
-

Communication

General

We are all constantly learning and evolving as dancers and members of the dance community. We can do this best if we have an open dialogue with each other about dancing!

Preventing unsafe interactions – catching problems before they grow

Before each dance

- Check in with your partner every now and then. Everyone is different. We have varying physical abilities, we get dizzy from different things, we have different preferences, we are strong (or not) in different places, etc. Because of these differences, we can't accurately guess how our dancing feels to our partners; the only way to know for sure is to ask.
- Ask questions of your dance partners and people in your circle. For example:
 - Dip?
 - Is it OK if I _____?
 - How do you feel about _____?

During each dance

- If someone is doing something you don't like, it's okay to tell them by saying, "Stop!" or "I don't like twirls," or "Please move your hand towards the center of my back," or "You're swinging too close."



- If you encounter a painful or uncomfortable situation in the middle of the dance, saying a firm “Ouch,” “No,” or “Stop that” can be the quickest way to indicate a problem. If you feel that you are in immediate danger, **you have the right to leave the line.** You are more important than the dance.
- Be aware of and respect the physical needs, skill level, and energy of your partners and neighbors as you dance.
- Non-verbal communication: Be aware of signals from your partner that they may not be enjoying something. Pay attention to body language and facial expressions. If someone pulls away, it suggests they don’t like being so close. Respect their unspoken feedback.

Responding to feedback

- If anyone asks you to stop doing something, apologize and stop doing it.
- “So sorry; thanks for telling me.”

Dance Atmosphere

General

Community statement at the door / promoting group welfare

- We’re all here to have fun. Be aware of and respect the physical needs, skill level, and energy of your partners and neighbors as you dance. Try not to be judgmental; hold your tongue even if you *feel* judgmental.
- Support community culture and avoid being cliquish. For the most part, try not to book ahead. Just turn to whoever is closest or look to the sidelines to find a partner.

Eye contact

- Eye contact can be fun, but keep it light. Remember that your partner’s comfort zone may be different from yours. Err on the side of being respectful.



Thanks to Bruce Hamilton for this New Yorker cartoon by Charlie Hankin.

- Eye contact is fun except when it isn't. On moves like swing and allemande, eye contact helps avoid dizziness. If it's uncomfortable for you, look at a shoulder, ear, or forehead.
- Smiling and eye contact are part of the fun, but refrain from predatory or intimidating behavior.
- While eye contact is encouraged in most social dancing and can help with dizziness when turning, if it makes you uncomfortable, don't feel forced. Always communicate with other dancers if you need to dance differently. If turning, or in a closed couple position, you can look at your partner's ear or shoulder.
- Be sensitive to personal and cultural differences about eye contact. Don't force or judge.

Flirtation

Advice to organizers: *Keep in mind that a number of people in our community want to connect with others but may not be skilled in the nuances. We cannot expect people to “read” their partner's comfort zone in every case, but we can expect people to read and understand rules and norms if clearly stated. Try to encourage a culture of offering direct feedback and gracious acceptance of feedback.*

- While flirtation is often part of social dancing, it can make dancers uncomfortable and is not an essential part of our styles of social dancing. Please limit flirtation to dancers who are known to you and with whom you have built a rapport! If you're at all unsure, ask!
- Flirtation can be fun, but also off-putting. It is important to build rapport with each and every individual partner or neighbor before you add flirtations beyond standard dance moves.
- Consider who might be watching—children, your grandmother, a potential employer.

Respecting space

- While our dancing is often exuberant and fast moving, dancers should never be out of control. Always dance with the safety and comfort of other dancers in mind. There is a fine line between playful shenanigans and interference with others.
- Respect people's space. For example, if you like swinging in a close embrace, ask your partner/neighbor if they enjoy this too before initiating such a swing. If you see a person do this with someone else, it still doesn't mean they want to do it with everyone—ask!
- Be sure to keep your dancing within your “designated” dance space; don't invade others' space with wild moves.

Basic body mechanics / developing dance technique

Advice to organizers: We recommend that your beginner lessons include basic body mechanics for dancers. This is as important as what the moves are called and where to go when. These basics build community, help prevent injury, encourage dancers to develop their technique, and make dancing more fun for everyone. Teaching the concept of shared weight is particularly vital. [If you would like tips towards crafting a strong beginner lesson and on dance technique, look here.](#)

- Support your own weight. Connect with other dancers with equal and opposite tension: this is the concept of shared weight, which is a critical dance skill. Guide others, rather than dragging them. Lead firmly but gently.
- Use open-handed grips that are held together by the tension and input of both dancers; avoid grips that squeeze or encircle another person's thumb, hand, wrist, or body in a way they can't escape.

Flourishes

Flourishes (e.g., twirls, spins, swing variations) are optional embellishments. We recommend waiting to add flourishes until you have learned the basic mechanics. This will help avoid injuries.

- Listen to your partner for what they may need from you, e.g., not too many twirls or no twirls at all. Ask and receive verbal consent before doing anything with a partner/neighbor beyond the moves of the dance as taught by the caller.
- Dipping or lifting your partner on a crowded dance floor can be unsafe for you, your partner, and others around you. Please make sure your partner is willing, and the moves can be executed safely and on time ("When in doubt, leave it out!"). Many local dances don't allow dipping and lifting.
- Each dancer has both the right and the responsibility to maintain control of their body. Do not lift another dancer off the floor. Do not lift children. Do not dip people without their explicit permission.

Asking people to dance / responding to invitations

Historically, some dancers were taught that they must sit out if they decline a dance. This is no longer expected. As our norms evolve, we strive to balance consent and safety with care for inclusion and community.

Asking

- Anyone may ask anyone to dance.
- If someone refuses your invitation to dance, just say “okay!” and then find another partner.
- Ask a partner kindly. Accept their answer cheerfully. If you are repeatedly declined by a prospective partner, it is best to give them space.
- It’s nice to check the sidelines for people who weren’t dancing the last dance but would like to dance the next one.

Responding

- You are always free to say no when someone asks you to dance. You don’t have to give a reason; you can just say “No, thank you.”
- Feel free to decline a dance with someone with whom you feel uncomfortable. If you would prefer not to dance with them, a simple “no thanks” is appropriate. We encourage you to dance with a variety of people both new and familiar, but your safety and comfort come first.

Issues

- Persistently ignoring or challenging another dancer’s expressed wish to not interact during the course of an evening is harassment and is not acceptable.
- If someone has declined to dance with you, the etiquette in some communities is not to ask that person again that same night. If they would like to dance with you, they can come ask you—it’s their turn to do the asking.

Advice to organizers: *“It’s okay to say no” is the bottom line for safety purposes. However, etiquette is nuanced; we hope leaders will encourage kindness in this context. See [“Inclusivity”](#) below. More resources will be forthcoming regarding these nuances. It’s worth discussing within your community.*

Roles

Coming soon: *Sensitive Topics: Dance Roles, Gender, and Language. Check back for a more detailed resource on this issue. Meanwhile, these ideas address this issue in a general way:*

- You may dance whichever role you prefer: gent/lady, right/left, lark/robin, etc.
- Our dance roles are just that—a role, not an identity. Gender identity does not matter in choosing a partner. Anyone can ask anyone. In many communities, it is common to dance either role. Some folks dance one role or the other for a whole dance; some dancers switch back and forth during the dance (but this is more challenging). Many beginners find it easier to pick one role and stick with it for a while.
- You should trust that the dancer coming towards you is dancing the role they chose and respond with the called moves for your role.

- Be aware that the dancer coming at you may be dancing in their intended role or may be a beginner who needs help. (Note: Some communities use visual cues, such as wristbands or neck ribbons, to identify who is dancing which role.)
- Be aware that it is common for any gender to dance either role. It can be helpful to point beginners to their intended position if they are inadvertently switched. At the same time, experienced dancers may be “switched” on purpose and do not want to be doubted or corrected. It is a fine line to balance, whether to attempt to be helpful or not. Consider a quick inquiry: “Are you on the left on purpose?” Or let them know, “I’m the robin.”

Offering to help others

- Help new dancers listen to the caller, especially during the walk-through. The best dancers help others by gesturing: reaching out for their hand in a clear definitive way, gently guiding in the correct direction to go, indicating the correct path or spot on the floor, etc.
- Be mindful that new-to-you faces may not be new dancers. Don’t assume they need help. This applies to children as well as adults! Treat children with the same respect as adults; don’t be condescending.
- Help all dancers listen to the caller by being attentive to the caller yourself. Refrain from conversation. Assist people by gesturing in a friendly manner. Please see [“What to Do When You’re Not the Caller”](#) by Bruce Hamilton.

Learning advice for new dancers

- Most importantly, pay attention to the caller!
- Watch and follow others, but listen to the caller. The best dancers will help beginners through gentle gestures, rather than talking over the caller. See if you can adjust your movement accordingly.
- It is courteous to everyone to refrain from conversation when the caller is talking.
- If you can’t hear the caller, it’s okay to let your chatty neighbors know.

Mistakes in the dance

- It’s only a dance. Just have fun. Mistakes happen, and the dance goes on.
- Don’t fret if you get mixed up. Smile and keep moving. As you gain experience, you will learn strategies for recovering from mistakes. If things really unravel, just take a breath and get in place for your next neighbors and you’ll be back on track.

Inclusivity

(See also the [“Inclusivity”](#) section of the CDSS Resource Portal)

Health, hygiene, and related accessibility issues

(Note: These guidelines are culled from samples that were written pre-Covid. Adapt as necessary for changing times.)

Health

- Hand contact during dancing can pass germs. Please be sure to wash your hands often, and/or use hand sanitizer.
- Be careful not to touch your face or eat until after you’ve washed your hands.

Illness

- Please stay home from dance events if you have any symptoms of illness or think you may have been exposed to anyone who is ill. Better safe than sorry. Dances can be powerful vectors for spreading contagion.

Hygiene

- Because dancing involves close contact, please be sure you have bathed recently, wear clothes that are relatively fresh, avoid scented products, etc., so as not to offend anyone.
- Contra dancing is a physically vigorous activity, and keeping clean and dry can be a challenge. Please be sure your own body and clothing are clean. As a courtesy, consider bringing a hand towel or fresh shirts.
- Sweating intensifies scents, so please avoid using scented products.

Scents / chemical sensitivities

- Please do not wear scented products to our dance events. Some people are allergic or have severe chemical sensitivities. Even small amounts of scent become very intense when we sweat during activity.
- Some of our dancers are hypersensitive or allergic to scented products such as perfume, after-shave, or cologne. Even scented deodorants, laundry, and hair products will cause an adverse reaction. Please do not wear scented products of any kind to a dance.

- All _____ events are fragrance-free (e.g., all Mayberry contra dances are fragrance free). Please avoid aftershave, perfume, tobacco, and all other scented products. This will improve the atmosphere for the significant number of dancers who have severe reactions to such products.

Note to organizers: Please see additional resources for deeper discussion of chemical sensitivities, including a list of unscented products that some highly sensitive folks have found acceptable.

Awareness of physical abilities

Accommodating those who need it

- Individual dancers vary in their ability to move on the dance floor, from highly agile to limited mobility, so it is important to be aware of the dancers around you and accommodate individual differences as needed.
- Consider that some physical challenges are not obvious. Be aware if your partner has any limitations.
- It's our culture to communicate with each other a lot! We encourage dancers to ask and inform each other about any physical limitations and to accommodate each other as needed, graciously.
- We aim to be welcoming to everyone. This includes participants with any ability/disability. You may encounter dancers who are blind or deaf, dancers who use crutches, a wheelchair, an oxygen tank, etc. Feel free to ask them what they need, if anything, and enjoy their company.

Don't try to be helpful when it's not needed

- Be aware that other dancers may be modifying their movements to accommodate their individual situations; trust that dancers know their own bodies and needs.
- If someone is skipping moves or taking other shortcuts without disrupting the dance, presume they have a reason for doing so and don't try to "fix" them.

Eliminating Emotional Barriers

Advice to organizers: *Vocabulary matters! In everything you say—written or oral—take care to use vocabulary that welcomes the diverse community you seek to engage (welcome poster, dance instructions, code of conduct, ...). For example: saying he/she/they rather than just he/she conveys sensitivity to gender diversity. Similarly, calling college students “young adults” conveys more respect than calling them “kids.”*

Anti-oppression or diversity, equity, and inclusion training is available from other organizations. For more information, search online to find a provider that suits your needs.

Consider possible efforts to intentionally engage underrepresented populations—promote or increase diversity (age, ethnic, etc.).

Some communities display posters or other visuals (“Everyone is welcome here!”) to convey openness to newcomers and to remind regulars that this is a core value of the community.

Insensitivity and harassment

- Sexual harassment and predation are not tolerated in our dance community. We strive to be kind here. Please seek out the dance host, if anything makes you uncomfortable at the dance.
- Sexual harassment and predation are not tolerated in our dance community. Please refer to our complete code of conduct for details on behavior and consequences.
- Harassment and predation are not tolerated and are covered in our code of conduct. Insensitivity and offense are nuanced challenges that require awareness and sometimes education and/or modulation.
- Please refrain from sexual innuendo, and think carefully before commenting on a dancer’s appearance, ethnic heritage, or any other potentially sensitive topic.

Welcoming marginalized populations; being aware of and avoiding microaggressions

Definition: Microaggression is a term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups.

- We value diversity and strive for respect for everyone. Microaggression refers to brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, intentional or not, that communicate

derogatory or hostile prejudice in the form of slights or insults toward a particular group. We encourage our community to be aware of individuals' differences and to be aware of and avoid any microaggression on or off the dance floor.

- Avoid verbal or environmental unfriendliness when approaching dancers whom you don't know well.

Advice to organizers: *Regarding marginalized populations: Address prejudice, beratement, and verbal harassment in policy documents. Then cross-reference them here—explain that overt offense is a policy violation, while microaggression is a culture, courtesy, and etiquette concern.*

Body comments

- “Have you lost weight?”, while meant as a compliment, can make a person feel their body is being scrutinized and judged. You don't know what might be going on with someone—maybe they lost weight due to illness or gaining is healthy for them.
- “That's a pretty dress” or “great shirt!” is better than “that dress looks great **on you**”—comments about bodies can be intrusive, even if well-intended. Comments about clothing are less personal. Focus on the clothing or the art of someone's costume, rather than the person's physique.
- Unsolicited comments, even well-intended ones, about any aspect of appearance, can make people uncomfortable.
- Any comment about a person's appearance may have a negative effect, regardless of the speaker's intent. It's a boundary thing. When in doubt, leave it out.
- Some people feel put-upon when people exclaim “Smile!” The implication is that their resting face is unattractive.

Gender language

Note to organizers: *Some people feel that use of gendered role-terms (e.g., ladies and gents) falls under the umbrella of microaggression toward LGBTQ+ dancers. We do not address role-terms in this section of the toolkit. Please see [additional resources](#) for discussion on how to address this question in your community and form a local policy in a positive way.*

Other microaggressions

Stereotypes and assumptions about or evaluations of people based on their appearance can be unconscious, and when they come out in conversation they can be very hurtful and make people feel othered. These can be about race and ethnicity, religion, age, class, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, and many other qualities. Some examples:

- In 2007, some people commented on how articulate Barack Obama was, implying that that is unusual for black men. If you are surprised by learning information that contradicts a stereotype you hold, try to keep that to yourself in the moment, and think about why you had that response.
- Asking people who don't appear white, "Where are you from?" and disbelieving their answer is a microaggression.
- Saying, "Wow, you sure are spry," to someone over 40 implies that contra dancing is only for people of a certain age or fitness level. Saying, "Are you sure you're at the right dance?" to a 20-something at an English country dance implies they are not mature enough or somehow won't be skilled enough for the dance. These are microaggressions.

Booking ahead

Advice to organizers: *Booking ahead is a delicate question of inclusivity—too much to put into this section of the toolkit—but an important issue to consider and address as a community. We suggest that you carry out a community input process (or leadership discussion) to agree on the guidelines that feel right for your community.*

- Booking ahead works against community building. Dancers who book ahead are minimizing their connection to the larger group—a new friend is waiting to meet them tonight!
- Be willing to dance with many different partners, including ones you have not met before.
- Balance your selection of partners between favorites, new friends, and people sitting out.

Singles welcome

- The dancing is done in sets of couples and is very social and interactive. One or more callers provide instructions, and there is a tradition of friendliness and changing of partners. One need never hesitate to come alone.

- Everyone is welcome! No partner or previous dance experience is necessary. Come alone, or bring a friend!
- It is our culture to change partners throughout the evening, even couples who attend together. This helps singles integrate seamlessly in finding a new partner for each dance.

Attitude

- Strive to be flexible, welcoming, and non-judgmental in your attitude and expressions. Be your best self.
- Be friendly to new dancers, supporting them as they learn about your community. Remain sensitive to how much conversation and coaching new dancers appreciate.
- Some new dancers appreciate a lot of interaction as a warm welcome, while others prefer the opportunity to figure things out on their own. Try to be aware of different people's reactions and adjust your initiative accordingly. Some people may feel "pounced upon" even if the welcomer did not intend to be aggressive.
- Be willing to dance with many different partners.
- Show appreciation for the organizers, musicians, caller, sound tech, etc. If you have complaints or concerns, express them with respect.

Promoting a culture of consent

See also ["Communication"](#) and ["Flourishes"](#) (under ["Dance Atmosphere"](#)), above. These three are intricately interwoven.

- Get consent for flourishes or for more energetic dancing: Do you like to twirl? Do you like to swing fast?
- Every dance move is an interaction between two or more people. Invite another dancer in; do not force them.
- Before you have permission to flourish with someone, you have to develop a rapport with them. You have to get to know their preferences, their dance skills, and their comfort level.
 - The contra dance culture does embrace some level of free-spiritedness and friendly flirtation, but it has NOT discarded mutual respect as a primary tenet.

- Consent is about communication. Receiving consent includes verbal communication and physical cues. If someone resists a move or pushes you away, respect the response—don't do it again.
- Feedback:
 - It is common in our dance environment to give each other feedback. If anything makes you uncomfortable, speak up right away and let the person know.
 - If you don't feel comfortable giving feedback to a dancer, please approach an organizer. They can help as needed. At the very least, it's helpful to know if someone is making others uncomfortable in case it is a recurring pattern.
- Never lift anyone without their explicit consent, especially children or any dancer who is easily picked up.

Take care of yourself

- If you're tired (physically or emotionally), feel free to take a break.
 - Dancing is exercise—be sure to drink plenty of water.
 - Wash your hands after dancing—see [“Health, hygiene, and related accessibility issues”](#) above.
 - Wear comfortable shoes, and clothes that allow movement.
- Talk to your partners:
 - I'm dizzy. Can we slow down?
 - My shoulder/wrist/hand hurts. Can we find an easier way to swing/allemande?
 - Thanks. That swing was perfect.
- See [“Communication”](#) section above for more detail.
- If you have an injury, tell people verbally, or flag it by wearing a brace, red bandana, or badge.

Comfort with close proximity

In many kinds of dancing, you are brought into close contact with others. Comfort with close proximity varies among dancers. Accommodate individual differences as needed. Be aware of body language and facial expressions. Don't pull anyone in closer if they seem uncomfortable or resistant.

Eliminating Socioeconomic Barriers

Cost of admission

Note to Organizers: This section is not really part of culture and etiquette, but rather simply examples of how some communities have set their admissions policies to help eliminate cost barriers:

- Consider sliding scale or other options to support dancers on tight budgets, e.g.:
 - \$20 supporters
 - \$12 non-members
 - \$10 members
 - \$6 students or low-income
 - or pay what you can
- Admission: \$6–\$12. (When people hand over a \$10 or \$20, ask how much change they want, or how many people this is covering.)
- We offer a work-trade option for volunteering. Sign up to help us run the dance (openers, closers, door-staffing), and as a token of thanks, we'll invite you to dance for free.
- This dance follows our “pay what you can” policy: We suggest \$10/person to cover costs, but please come and pay what works best for you.

Expectations for footwear and clothing

- Please wear soft-soled, non-marking shoes to protect the floor. We recommend smooth-soled shoes for good gliding. Basic sneakers are fine, but rubber soles stick, rather than sliding. A good solution is to wear old socks OVER the toe of the shoe.
- We recommend wearing clean, comfortable shoes to keep the floor clean, and breathable clothes that allow easy movement. Nothing fancy is required!
- Please carry in clean-soled shoes so as not to track in dirt and damage the floor.
- Festive dress—whatever that means to you (and fragrance-free! Please see the [“Health, hygiene, and related accessibility issues”](#) section above).
- (When the event is a costume event:) Costumes admired but not required.

Transportation

- Dancers in need of transportation may contact organizers.
- Here in (city name) we often meet for carpooling to dances at the ___ parking lot. Feel free to show up and join the carpool. Contact ___ for more info about ride-sharing.

Dealing with Problems

Advice to organizers: *It is common for first-time attendees to have a discomfiting experience and never return. If encouraging reporting is something you want to do, the language you choose from this section needs to be communicated verbally at each dance. New dancers will not read your written guidelines during their first evening. Announce at each event that, as organizers, you encourage reporting, and will take every comment seriously. You might also post a small sign at the door and in the bathrooms, and perhaps hand out a small postcard aimed at newcomers with the most essential points of these etiquette norms, especially welcoming feedback.*

Reporting

Encouraging reporting

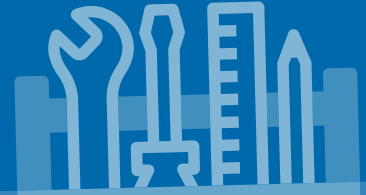
- If anyone makes you feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or embarrassed, you can address it with them directly during or after the dance.
 - If you're not comfortable addressing it with them, we encourage you to approach one of the organizers *[note local ID method]*, who will work with you to resolve the situation in a way that helps you feel safe and comfortable. This will typically involve the committee members reminding the dancer of our community standards, and asking them to change their behavior.
 - For full details about our complaint response procedures, please see this policy document. *[Add local detail for where to find it.]*
- If someone treats you in a way that is intrusive or unwelcoming, or makes you feel unsafe, we want to know. If we don't know about it, we can't address it.
- If you would warn your friends to avoid someone, it is worth reporting. We won't know that there is a pattern of inappropriate behavior unless people report single incidents.

Response to reports

Note to organizers: Your complaint response procedures should be a separate document that you provide to your community. Complaint Procedures are the topic of Part 4 of this toolkit. See the [Resource Portal](#) for some resources to get started. Once you have developed your own complaint policies and procedures, you can reference them at this point in your own etiquette guidelines.

References

- [Scout House \(Concord, MA\) poster](#)
- [Contra Etiquette from Country Dance New York \(CDNY\)](#)
- [Chicago Barn Dance Company \(CBDC\) Etiquette](#)
- [Statement of Principles from Hands Four Dancers of Ithaca \(HFDI\)](#)
- [Bay Area Country Dance Society \(BACDS\) Code of Conduct](#)
- [Bay Area Country Dance Society \(BACDS\) Fragrance Free Policy](#)



**Part
4**

Complaint Procedures

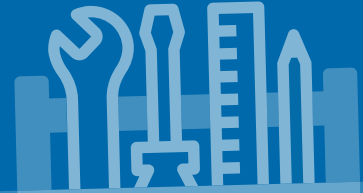
These outline the ways and means of handling complaints and infractions:

- Whom to complain to
- Who follows up
- How complaints are handled
- Timeliness of response
- Confidentiality
- Due process
- Documentation
- Legal concerns
- Levels of severity
- Pathways for improvement and pathways for ultimate removal

The best guide we have found on this topic is [***How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports***](#), by Valerie Aurora and Mary Gardiner, available for free from Frameshift Consulting. This guide covers what to include and what to leave out as well as guidance for how to respond to infractions.

In addition, the following examples provide sample language you can use, in the dance context. Local organizers can adopt these procedures for their own policies, or adapt them as needed. An additional writing template would be duplicative, so we simply encourage you to review these examples and cite them as a source as you craft your own complaint procedures:

- [BIDA “How We Can Help”](#)
- [Old Farmer’s Ball Complaint Procedures](#)
- [Policy for Dealing with Complaints of Inappropriate Behavior](#)
- [Taking a Safety Report](#)
- [Philadelphia Area Traditional Music and Dance Policy and Procedures for Dealing With Complaints of Inappropriate Behavior](#)



**Part
5**

Safety in the Physical Space: The Venue

Acknowledgements

Produced by members of the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: John Seto, Dorcas Hand, Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand. Published March 2024.

The location, structure, and amenities of a dance venue greatly impact the safety and enjoyment of all participants. The following is a list of factors to consider when a site for a dance, music, or song event is needed. These items are generally non-controversial, and are not related to personal interaction. They don't require educating the community. Rather, use this as a checklist of concerns for leaders to be aware of and consider addressing. Not everything will apply to every group or event, and this list is especially aimed at dance events. Take what is useful. It is always good to maintain clear and friendly communications with the venue/site managers!

This is not an exhaustive list. We welcome additional ideas.

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Location and accessibility

- **Public transportation:** Are there bus lines or subway stations nearby?
- **Neighborhood, parking, and signage:** General safety, street lighting, and adequate parking? Is it easy to find? Are there any safety concerns if someone were to wander around a bit trying to find the event? Are there concerns about safety of vehicles left unattended? Some events include an expense in their budget to hire a security guard to watch the parking lot if the neighborhood is considered risky.

Structure and amenities—questions to consider when you initially visit a venue

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance**
 - Wheelchair-accessible parking space(s) available?
 - Ramp or lift for entry?
 - ADA bathrooms? These should be on the same level as the dance floor, unless there is elevator access.
- **Drinking water:** Let attendees know what to expect. What hydration will be available (or not)? What do they need to be responsible for bringing themselves?
- **Flooring:** Damage, slickness, obstructions, exposed nail heads, etc.? Sprung wood is best; wood over cement is hard on feet and knees.
- **HVAC:** Heat and cooling available? Do windows open? Can fans help ventilation and circulation of air?
- **Lighting, electrical capacity, and outlets:** Sufficient to meet needs? Make sure to consult with experienced musicians or sound techs to make sure the electrical capacity can accommodate the kinds of bands you plan to have.
- **Acoustics:** Are there echoes? These may be remedied with sound panels, banners, curtains. Dead spots? Solutions may involve adjusting how speakers are aimed. Can you measure decibel levels? There are government regulations regarding safe levels. Here are the U.S. [OSHA guidelines](#) for safe maximums.
- **Cost vs. capacity:** Is the venue affordable? Is the space adequate for band, dancers, caller, and sound system?
- **Storage:** Is there a secure space to keep your event materials (entry table items, such as cash box, flyers, etc.; sound system components) or will you need to transport all your stuff each time?

- **Kitchen availability:** Stove, refrigerator, sinks, fire extinguishers, etc.?
- **Chairs:** Does the venue have chairs? How many? Where are they stored? If not, do you have a way to provide chairs and/or seating options?
- **Hygiene:** Does the venue have sufficient bathroom and handwashing facilities for your expected group size? Are soap and towels provided and well-stocked, or will you need to bring your own supplies?
- **Sanitation, garbage cans, etc.:** Are there adequate garbage facilities? Make sure you know where to put trash and recycling. What is your group's responsibility vs. the venue's responsibility? Know expectations and requirements for cleanup and closing procedures that your group will need to manage. Know where to find materials for cleaning up spills and breaks (e.g., broken water bottle or potluck dish).
- **Staffing:** Does the venue require that a staff person (from their staff) be present? Do they require (or do you need) security personnel at the building or parking lot? Consider expenses for these people.

Event preparation

- **Insurance:** How will you ensure compliance? Insurance should be updated if venues are added. In addition to required liability insurance, consider insuring against your costs if you have to cancel. See below for more details regarding emergency planning and cancellation policy.
- **Equipment setup and safety:** How will you manage electrical cords, speaker stand location, etc.?
- **Local noise ordinance compliance** (especially in residential neighborhoods and late at night): What are the applicable ordinances?
- **Staff and volunteers:** How will you designate roles and responsibilities and individuals?
- **Food safety:** Allergies, especially tree nuts and peanuts. How will you note potential allergens? Label all food ingredients in case of allergies or other dietary restrictions.
- **Fragrance-free:** Consider making your event(s) fragrance-free. This is a health requirement for many potential attendees. It applies to hand soap in bathrooms, hand sanitizer, dish soap, etc. provided by the venue or the organizers as well as personal hygiene products of attendees. See additional guidance in the bonus guide later in this toolkit.
- Observe compliance with **trash/recycling/composting codes** of different municipalities and venues.

Contingency plans

- Store **contact information** for building managers on-site and off-site in case of a building emergency, such as broken pipes, lights or hot water not working, alarm going off, keys not working.
 - What is your template for a **cancellation policy**? In an emergency (or questionable conditions), there should be a clear policy to follow, rather than the evening's host needing to formulate a policy under pressure.
-

Medical needs/emergencies

- Does the building provide a **first aid kit? Defibrillator**?
 - Where are building **evacuation procedures/diagrams** in case of emergency?
 - Does the building have a **fire alarm system**? When was it last inspected? Are fire extinguishers charged and available per local codes?
 - Establish procedures for potential **natural disasters/dangerous weather conditions** (wildfires, floods, tornadoes, blizzards, ice storms, earthquakes, etc.)
 - **Have an emergency plan**: Consider how far in advance the band, caller, and dancers may need to set out in your decisions about cancellation timing.
 - **Predictable cancellations**: blizzard warnings
 - **Last-minute cancellations**: e.g., if the building has a pipe leak and the dance can't happen. If there's a short-notice cancellation, will someone be able to put a sign up at the venue safely? Can the venue manager do that?
-

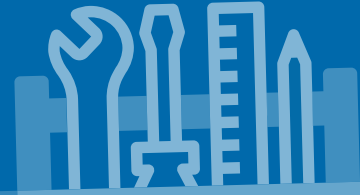
Medical and emergency-related considerations from the organizational side

- Keep instructions readily available regarding **what to do if someone collapses** at the dance.
- **Locate defibrillator(s) (AED[s])** at the venue and identify individuals trained on how to use an AED (or at a minimum, what to do if someone has a heart attack, beyond calling 911).

- Make sure your event host or manager knows where **emergency contacts/procedures** are posted or available (perhaps with the first aid kit), including location info for EMTs so they will know
 - how to get to the hall
 - where to park
 - what building to come to (if part of a campus)
 - Know who in the community is a **medical professional**. Have a sign at entry saying “If you’re a medical professional who would be qualified and willing to assist in a medical emergency, please identify yourself to the organizers for the night.” Or ID emergency volunteers for the evening during early announcements.
-

Additional Resources:

- <https://www.facebook.com/gareth.kiddier/posts/10219575769852513> has a good discussion of potential hazards.



**Part
6**

Resources for Considering the Use of Non-Gendered Terminology

Acknowledgements

Produced by members of the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Olivia Barry, Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand, Dorcas Hand, Marni Rachmiel, Chris Weiler. Published March 2024.

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Overview

Terminology used by music, song, and dance traditions evolves as the world around them evolves. Non-gendered terminology is not a recent idea. Rather, the desire to use non-gendered terminology has been around for decades and possibly even centuries. Social dance forms imitate the reality of our societal contexts and cultural norms.

One goal of our dance communities is to cultivate safety and inclusivity. Non-gendered terminology and/or positional calling (eliminating role-terminology altogether) may be a question your community wants to consider in order to create a strong sense of community in your music, song, and dance events. We remind readers that with this document, CDSS is not recommending any specific resolution. We advocate for tolerance without advocating for language change in particular. We believe that each community's values should guide their choices and policies. We advocate for universal respect for others' boundaries and choices, and respect for people's bodies.

Why Use Non-Gendered Terminology?

This section summarizes arguments in favor of non-gendered terminology. This is a synthesis of statements taken from dance communities' websites and from social media discussions. Direct attributions have been removed and many statements have been combined to reduce repetition and to group similar ideas together. Over a period of time, this task group participated in and observed a number of discussions both in person and online. What follows is a synthesis of these discussions.

Arguments in favor of non-gendered terms:

- “Not everyone identifies as a “he” or “she.” By switching to non-gendered terms, we can make our dance spaces more welcoming and inclusive.
 - Being called something you're not may not offend everyone, but for some people, the terms are a constant reminder that they are perceived by many as an “other” in our society. Gendered terminology, in the context of partnered dance, reinforces the idea that heterosexual is the only normal. The use of gendered terms continually reinforces the idea that men are supposed to do X, and women are supposed to do Y. Having constant reminders (known as “microaggressions”) that imply that society doesn't approve of being genderqueer / trans / etc. is “at least annoying, and at most, soul-sucking.”

- Contra dance is supposed to be a safe space for everyone. For dances specifically meant to create safe spaces for LGBTQ members (and others), using gender free terms removes potential stigma, particularly for men who like to dance with men, as that is the group that tends to get the most negative attention when they do so at a societally-mainstream gendered contra dance.
 - LGBTQ+ people already deal with a significant amount of discrimination, which in real world situations can lead to violence. Providing safe spaces reduces the risk of violence.
- Many people who are cisgender and/or heterosexual still like to dance the “opposite” role. This creates a range of issues with gendered calling:
 - For some role-switchers, being called a “lady” or “gent,” when that is not what they are, is offensive.
 - When dancers don’t expect a certain gender in a certain location, we eliminate the impression that people are “out of place” or are confusing other dancers. This should reduce or eliminate negative thoughts and comments directed at people dancing the “wrong role.”
 - *I’m so tired of others trying to “fix” me and my partner, having to explain to every set of new neighbors that we actually **are** in the positions we want to be in.*
 - Other dancers sometimes give role-switchers a hard time. E.g., they might teasingly say “you’re the prettiest lady around” to a man dancing the “lady” role. This is often laughed at, but really it isn’t funny and it isn’t welcoming.
 - “Switchy dancing” (switching dance roles back-and-forth during the same dance) when using “Ladies and Gents” roles can create additional confusion for other dancers who suddenly find themselves dancing with a male-presenting neighbor or shadow in the “Ladies” role, or vice-versa. This is where the popular phrase “dance with whoever’s comin’ atcha” came from. Non-gendered terminology separates gender identity or presentation from the dance role and reduces those expectations.
- Some dancers see the use of gendered terms to be superfluous.
- Non-gendered terms provide people with more potential dance partners, which reduces the pressure to dance with people who make you uncomfortable or are not a good fit for your dance style.
 - This helps solve the problem of some (predatory) men pressuring more-vulnerable women into dancing, using the tactic that “there are no other women available.” Non-gendered dancing creates a norm of men dancing with other men, and eliminates any obligation to have mixed-gender couples.

- Non-gendered dancing reduces the number of people who “have to” sit out for the lack of a “suitable” partner.
 - Gents and Ladies are inherently gendered terms. Because of this, many dancers feel pressure to dance a specific role.
- Non-gendered terminology exposes sexist and homophobic beliefs so they can be addressed explicitly. For example, when a man says he will not swing another man, or when a woman says that men leading and women following is the natural order of the world, we have an opportunity to start a dialogue about their concerns and how we can help everyone feel more comfortable. For the dance to be safe, it is critical to communicate that we are open to discussing different beliefs. The dance should be safe for everyone, including people who hold “gender-traditional” beliefs.
 - Non-gendered terminology could help people who are uncomfortable with same-gender contact to develop greater comfort, through practice and re-defining the norm. For some, gendered terms could actually be contributing to the discomfort, while non-gendered terms could help ease such discomfort.
- Non-gendered terminology makes dancing more accessible to children. Sometimes a dad wants to dance with his son, or a mother with her daughter. The terms “gent and lady” make this more difficult and less accepting of having a girl dance the “gent” role, or the son dance the “lady” role. In other cases, two boys or two girls might want to dance together because at certain ages, “boys are gross, and girls have cooties.”
 - Calling non-gendered opens the potential for more opportunities to call in a variety of situations.
- Non-gendered dancing creates a physically safer dance environment. c to what your partner needs to make dancing feel good for both you **and** them.
 - Explicit communication is encouraged about what roles people want to dance, and this leads to more explicit discussion about other concerns—for example, whether people are okay with flourishes, and what kind of flourishes. When there is more open communication, people are more likely to give each other feedback. Also, dancers who learn both roles may be more informed about the experience of the other role, and thus may be more likely to dance safely/gently.
 - This is a creative, fun way to challenge dancers to increase their skill, knowing both roles.
- Non-gendered dancers – by dancing both roles regularly – begin to look at dance from a global, rather than individual perspective. Because everyone dances together, non-gendered dancing tends to promote and build a satisfying and inclusive community.

- This style of dancing emphasizes community-building aspects of dancing rather than coupling.
- Non-gendered terminology cultivates the values of consent and compassionate communication, towards the goal of a more intentional connection to ourselves, each other, and community.

For callers:

- Knowing how to call and dance in a non-gendered way will potentially improve your calling and choreography skills because it emphasizes looking at the whole dance, not just what you do with your partner or neighbor of the opposite sex. It challenges you to see the dance from either role's perspective. This insight can help you to be a better caller because it will help you choose dances that are more comfortable and enjoyable for both roles to dance and will help you to guide each role confidently when clarity is important.
- Looking at calling and dancing from a non-gendered perspective will enhance your creative possibilities of choreographing your own dance figures.

Why stick with gendered terminology?

This section summarizes arguments in favor of “Lady-Gent” or other gendered terminology. This is a synthesis of statements taken from social media discussions or one-on-one conversations. Direct attributions have been removed and many statements have been combined to reduce repetition and to group similar ideas together.

- This isn't a problem in our community—maybe it's an issue in large urban areas, but it's not an issue for our local group. We don't have any non-binary dancers in our dance community, and no one has expressed a concern about terminology.
- The majority of our dancers prefer traditional terms. We expect that changing terminology for a small minority of dancers who **might** feel offended will make the majority of our dancers unhappy.
- Traditional terms help dancers more easily identify their role. Most dancers identify more strongly with one gender or the other (whether or not it's the one they were assigned at birth), and dancers can choose whichever role they want. If they don't feel a need to identify with the role they're dancing, they can switch back and forth. But for many dancers, matching the term with their own identification makes it easier to respond to the calls. In short, traditional terminology is less confusing for many dancers.

- Non-gendered terminology has been bundled with an agenda to encourage everyone to dance both roles. For beginners, this adds significant confusion and makes the learning curve much steeper. Beginners do best when they pick one role and stick with it for the whole evening. The non-gendered movement has stigmatized **not** wanting to dance both roles.
- “*Gents and ladies* is what I’m used to, and there’s nothing wrong with that. I shouldn’t be judged for my preferences any more than anyone else should be judged for theirs. Why do some people’s preferences take precedence over others? We should find a fair way to decide what’s best for the group.”

A few common discussion points:

Special acknowledgement: several of these points include quotes from Chris Ricciotti, but they have been taken out of their original context and sometimes mixed with other points for efficiency. We don’t want to attribute ideas to Chris that might not be accurate, but we want to acknowledge his significant contribution to this section.

Is non-gendered dancing confusing, particularly for new people?

No:

- Folks newer to dancing do not have the years of experience from which to base their views on how dancing should be. New dancers are much easier to mold and tend to pay better attention than experienced dancers, who are more likely to feel they already know what to do. This is particularly true for children, who don’t have the preconceived notions about how dancing and gender works.
- In mixed settings, it has been observed that dancers with little or no experience, as well as children, pick up the concepts of non-gendered dancing without much confusion, or even a knowledge that they are dancing in non-gendered fashion, particularly if it’s not addressed as an issue and so long as everyone is encouraged to have a good time.
- It tends to be the more experienced dancers or callers—those who make this an issue—that seem to have the most difficulty with this dance philosophy. Some of this may come from the natural assumption that, as experienced dancers, they have **the** acquired knowledge of how dancing should work.
- However, it is also these same people who may try to shove what they perceive as a less experienced dancer into the place they think they should be based on the other person’s gender, when in fact, that other dancer may be exactly where they should be and know where they are going.

Yes:

- Dancing well requires being able to respond to the call in a fraction of a second. That involves processing who the call is for (which role), where to go, and the specific mechanics of the move (how). Most callers encourage beginners to pick one role and stick with it, until things become more automatic.
- When using traditional terms, the vast majority of new dancers choose to dance the role they identify with, even when it is explicitly discussed that it's just a role, and it's fine to pick either one. As such, gendered terminology makes the “who” automatic for a great majority of the population. When they only have to process two pieces of info (where and how), the on-ramp is easier for beginners.
- Using terms no one identifies with to convey “who” adds a third piece of info to be processed with each call, which adds a layer of confusion. This may not be an issue for a dance with all beginners (such as a community or school dance), but in a mixed group, when intermediate-level contras are called, the need to respond quickly and accurately is critical, and having to process “who” can create failure for beginners in that already challenging situation.
 - Gendered roles are easier for everyone—new and experienced dancers. Whether the added confusion is a worthwhile tradeoff for the benefit of making LGBTQ dancers feel more welcome is the real question. That depends on how much of a concern it is to dancers in the community. If there aren't any non-binary dancers in the group, or if dancers aren't role switching much, or if they don't care about terminology as much as the vocal activists, then it may not be needed. In that case, the benefit of using descriptive (gendered) terms is valuable.

Is non-gendered calling difficult to learn?

- Calling or dancing in a non-gendered way takes practice to perfect, just like learning how to dance or call in the first place. If you already know how to call or dance, the transition will be less effort, because you already have a base of skills to work from.
- Thinking of this simply as substituting non-gendered language, or “diagonal” or other set identifications, for words such as “gent,” “men,” “ladies,” or “women” will go a long way to help make this transition easier.
- In addition, it is helpful to have some visual cue for the dancers and caller, such as identifying roles with use of an armband, button, colored lei or neck ribbon, etc. This is particularly helpful for contra and square dancing, which by tradition uses gender roles to identify what each two dancers are doing. Using a system like this helps make it clear to everyone who is dancing what role and can help clear up any momentary confusion that could arise on the dance floor.

- There is a bit more to this from a philosophical viewpoint, but the basic idea for callers and dancers is word substitution and dancer identification.

Are non-gendered dance events breaking “tradition?”

- What is traditional, and what limits should it have? It’s a good question and one that has led to a lot of discussion, particularly on the impact non-gendered dancing is having on traditional dance today. If the English country dances that came over on the Mayflower did not evolve and change in America to suit the needs of our society, would we have our modern-day American contra dancing today?
- Each generation who dances changes the dance form in some way, in the same way that music, clothing styles, and the way we talk and even the food we eat change over time. Non-gendered contra dancing is just another tradition that has developed to help meet the needs of a community. Used wisely, it could be another tool to help attract more people to dancing and could go a long way to help adding to and preserving a dance tradition we all love.

Regarding “This isn’t a problem in our community:”

- There may be some in the local community who are not coming to dances, thus masking the problem.

Deciding what to do

This section is a summary of a [resource by Diane Silver](#).

When introducing the use of non-gendered terms as a new thing in a community, it is useful to address several issues separately:

A) Should we adopt non-gendered terms at all?

- What are the reasons **why** advocates want neutral terms?
 - Are there other strategies for achieving their goals/desires besides changing language? I.e., are there underlying issues that we should be addressing—exclusion? shaming? criticizing? unwanted “fixing?”
- What are the reasons **why** advocates for traditional terms don’t want to change?
 - Are there other strategies for achieving their goals/desires even while changing language?
 - e.g., if the issue is confusion, maybe some non-gendered terms are less confusing than others.

- If the issue is preference, it might just be a matter of getting to vote on the terms chosen.
- Are there other underlying reasons which, if addressed, would make dissenters more accepting?

Note: We have attempted to summarize the **whys** in this document, but this should not be a substitute for a listening session. People want to be heard. It is important to give them that opportunity. But the reasons given in the previous section are likely most of the reasons you will hear offered by members of your community. It should give you a head start in summarizing what you are likely to hear, but don't present your own list of reasons pro or con until **after** an initial listening session.

B) If we adopt non-gendered terms at all—is it for all the time, or only some of the time?

- If only some of the time, how will turn-taking be organized?
 - Turn-taking within an evening?
 - 1st half vs. 2nd half?
 - Alternating dances?
 - Turn-taking for whole evenings?
 - 50-50 split of the weeks?
 - Some other split based on % of community preferences?
 - Occasional non-gendered experiences to allow people to get used to it?
 - One per evening?
 - One per half?
 - One whole evening per month?
 - One whole evening per quarter?
 - Let the caller decide
- Communicate regularly what to expect for a given evening

C) Is the solution an all-or nothing choice, or could there be a process of evolving from one set of terms to another? How can callers teach dancers to be flexible in dancing to different role terms? In what ways can dancers learn to adapt to new terminology?

D) *If/when non-gendered terms are used, what exact terms do we choose to use?*

Advocates may say “just do it.” But unilateral implementation can easily backfire if the community does not feel buy-in for that decision. It can create division—those who like the change vs. those who don’t. Education and positive problem-solving help build a sense of unity for moving forward with a change. Most dance communities already intend to be welcoming to LGBTQ dancers. In the long run, you may achieve your goal faster by having the patience to use good process.

[Here’s an example of how one dance community facilitated a trial-and-feedback process.](#)

Also see a list of non-gendered dances below, in [Resources](#).

Facilitating the conversation—see:

- [Part 1B: Possible Governance Models and Processes](#)
- [How to organize and/or facilitate a community meeting that will leave everyone smiling](#)

Examples of alternative options—for if/when you have decided to explore or use non-gendered terms

- **Positional calling:** See:
 - [5 Things... Inside the Dancing Mind of... an evening chat focused on Global Terminology/Positional Calling with Brooke Friendly](#)
 - [2019 blog post by Jeff Kaufman](#)
 - [5 Benefits of Positional Calling \(and one challenge\)](#)
- **“Historical” Terminology:** Lately, some communities are advertising that they use “historical terminology,” which includes both positional and gendered terms, as appropriate. For some situations, this can be a potential compromise.
- **Room indicators**—e.g. entrance line/window line
- **Binary replacement terms**
 - Most common alternatives:
 - Larks and Robins
 - Larks and Ravens

- Bands and Bares
- Left File and Right File
- Additional ideas that have been floated:
 - Rubies and Jets
 - Moons and Stars
 - Rights and Lefts
 - Lions and Tigers
 - Jays and Rubies
 - Blue and Green

Feel free to be creative. In family dancing especially, there has been a great range of clever options.

- Leads and Follows

Concerns regarding Leads and Follows

In contra dancing, the actual contra moves are not led and followed—the caller is the leader and all the dancers are followers. Dancers might assist one another into the move that is called, but that’s not the same as leading. Leading implies a level of control. In led-and-followed dances, the leader chooses which move to do next. In contra, the caller makes that choice.

All led-and-followed moves in contra are flourishes borrowed from couple dancing—mostly swing, tango, and blues. In these styles, “Leads” are in charge. In a perfect world, people all have blank slates, but in reality, most people’s experience is that Leads are men and Follows are women. “Lead” and “Follow” reinforce gender roles and imply a power dynamic between the two roles, even more so than “Gents and Ladies.” To use Lead and Follow for contra dance roles implies that only the “Lead” should initiate flourishes. That is not consistent with the egalitarian rationale for switching terminology in the first place.

“Leads and Follows” are very awkward and confusing to call. “Lead” and “Follow” are already used as verbs in contra dance calling.

- ____ lead a hey for four
- ____ cross (the set), ____ follow
- ____ lead ____ along the set
- ____ lead a promenade
- (1s / 2s / actives) lead down the hall

With *Lead* and *Follow* as role terms, we would now have

- *Follows lead a hey for four*
- *Leads, follow the Follows*

While some of these can have their terms replaced, with the Lead / Follow terms, they still create oxymorons or redundancies that are confusing:

- *Follows start a hey for four*
- *Follows cross, leads behind*
- *Follows go left, leads behind*
- *Follows ahead, leads behind*
- *Follows in front, promenade*

Concerns regarding Larks and Ravens

At the beginning of the modern non-gendered movement in contra dancing (in the 20-teens), Larks and Ravens was promoted as the preferred replacement for Ladies and Gents. Some of the controversy about non-gendered language came from the strong promotion of that particular choice, rather than the issue of non-gendered terms per se. There was a great deal of social media discussion of the pros and cons of Larks and Ravens vs. other non-gendered options. By 2021, Larks and Robins began emerging as a popular alternative, and at the time of this publication (Spring 2024), this seems to be the most consistent choice, along with positional calling, which aims to not name the roles at all. As such, the need to discuss Larks and Ravens may be mostly irrelevant.

See also:

- [History of Larks/Ravens](#), 2019 blog post by Jeff Kaufman

Resources

Non-Gendered Dance Events (Note: most, but not all, are online)

- Saint Louis Gender-Free Contra Dance
- Village Contra—NYC Gender-Free Contra Dance (group)
- Boston Gender-Free Contra Dances and ECD
- Hands Across Contra Dance
- South Bay Contra Dance
- Berkeley Wednesday Contra Dance
- Lavender Country and Folk Dancers
- Cincinnati Gender-Free Contra Dance
- Hands Four
- Circle Left Contra Dance
- Rainbow Contra of Western Massachusetts
- East Bay Contra Dance
- Toronto Contra Dance
- Santa Cruz Contra Dance
- Providence Contra Dance
- PDX Contra Remix
- Portland Intown Contra Dance
- Downtown Amherst Contra Dance
- Contra Folk VT
- Queer Contra Chicago
- BIDA
- Colorado FOOTMAD
- Glen Echo
- Madison Queer Contra
- Oberlin Contra
- Northwestern Contra

Articles

- [Contraculture: Bird Names and the Degendering of Contra Dance](#) (Andrew Snyder)
- [Current Problems and Methods in Dance Reconstruction](#) (Parfitt-Brown et al.)
- [Dancing Gender](#) (Craig Owen)
- [Larks and Ravens: A Report from the Field](#) (Dela and Dugan Murphy)
- [Welcome to Gender-Free Dancing](#) (Chris Ricciotti)
- [Gender-Free Dancing—A Brief Historical Perspective](#) (Chris Ricciotti)

Calling Guides

- [Positional Calling for Contra](#) (Roni Wiener)
- [Complete Welcome to Gender-Free Dancing Guide](#) (Chris Ricciotti)
- [Gender-Free Calling Guide](#) (IFVDF)
- [New Contra Dance Caller Starter Guide](#) (Louise Siddons)

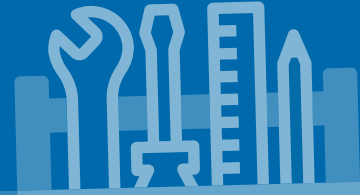
Other

- [Gender-Free Contra Dance Camps and Weekends](#)
- [Gender-Free Caller Directory](#)
- [Facebook Group: Gender-Free Contra](#) (formerly Larks and Ravens Contra Dancers)
- [Gender-Free Role Term Usage](#) (Jeff Kaufman)
- [Inclusivity and Dance Terminology](#)
- [The Heather and the Rose Country Dancers Terminology](#)
- [Gender-Free Calling and Dancing](#) (Jeremy Child)
- [Terminology Examples](#)
- [Global Terminology](#)
- [Video History of LGBTQ Gender-Free Contra and Folk Dancing Around Boston](#) (Chris Ricciotti)
- [Gender-Free Contra Dance Events](#)
- [Andrew's Notes on Calling](#) (Andrew Swaine)
- [Switching to Larks and Ravens](#) (Jeff Kaufman)
- [Discussion of Larks and Ravens](#) (Diane Silver, 2018)
- [Gender-Free Dancing](#) (Henry Morgenstein)
- [Contra Contrary to Norms](#) (Katie Okumu)
- [Webchat with Brooke Friendly](#)
- [5 Things chat with Louise Siddons](#)—changing labels did change behavior.
- [GF ECD Calling Conventions](#) (Read Weaver)
- [Contra Dancing: Why Larks and Ravens?](#) (Doe M. Taryn)
- [Switching to gender-neutral language in a positive way](#) (Diane Silver)

Additional resources on inclusivity:

[CDSS Resource Portal:](#)

https://cdss.org/resources/resource-portal/?sft_post_tag=non-gendered



Part
7A

Making Dance and Music Spaces Accessible to Participants with Chemical Sensitivities: A Brief Summary

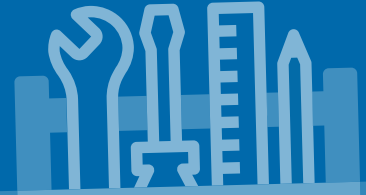
Chemical sensitivity is an invisible disability that affects around 30% of the population. For those people, the presence of scented products (perfumes, hair products, deodorants, laundry products, anything with a scent) is a significant barrier to access. Making your space accessible to those with chemical sensitivities is easier than you might think. Here is a quick overview to help you dive in and start with harm reduction:

1. **Adopt** a fragrance-free policy and let people know about it—on your website, in announcements, flyers, signs, etc.
2. **Ask** participants not to use scented products before attending; be detailed enough that they understand that skipping the perfume is essential, and so is using only unscented laundry products, fragrance-free hand sanitizer and deodorants, etc.
3. **Provide** fragrance-free products for handwashing at your events, and any other products that are regularly used. (Lotion? Hand sanitizer? At longer/residential events, things like shampoo and conditioner, shower gel, deodorant—any products participants would bring with them should be fragrance-free, and it's best to make that easy by providing safe products.)
4. **Remove** or block off scented products that normally live in your venue. Scented soaps can be moved or dispensers taped off; scent devices removed, closed, or blocked off.
5. **Ventilate** as much as possible to help mitigate inevitable scents that come in or remain from prior use.
6. **Communicate** with dancers and musicians in your community who are impacted by these issues; find out what they need, as sensitivities can vary by individual. Have a plan for who they can safely talk to if they're having a reaction, and who can talk to dancers who don't know about or have difficulty with the policy and show up wearing scents. Planning how you will handle issues can make a challenging situation a little easier on everyone.
7. **Know** that your care and effort for equity and inclusion of people with invisible disabilities like chemical sensitivities matters so much and is greatly appreciated.

Want to learn more? This task group has provided a [thorough description of the issues](#), a [detailed guide to implementation in different types of dance events](#), and a [list of suggested products and some tips for sourcing](#) to partially answer the question, "Then what *can* we use?"

Thank you for being willing to consider making your events accessible to dancers and musicians who are affected by chemical/fragrance sensitivities.





**Part
7B**

Scents and Access in Dance Spaces: An Introduction

Acknowledgements

Produced by the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Written by Marni Rachmiel; review by Diane Silver, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand. Published March 2024.

Responses to scents are very personal and very cultural. Each of us absorbs attitudes about smells from very early in life—attitudes that can be emotionally loaded. Some people have been shamed about their natural body smells and made to feel that only the use of perfumes will keep them from being shamed further (and this shaming has often been gendered and racialized). We live in a culture driven by advertising that manipulates our needs to be accepted and attractive in order to sell us things, many of which are unneeded and even harmful. Would we know we ‘needed’ or wanted these things if ads for them weren’t poured into us constantly?

This gives us some context for the mass of chemical smells that we are exposed to every day in mainstream culture. People fill homes and buildings and cars with air “fresheners” that are actually toxic, and that are designed to cling to hair and clothing. These scents cannot be washed off or aired out easily. People fill their laundry with fabric softeners and scented detergents that vent intense toxins into the air outside as well as filling their homes and off-gassing from their clothing. These products too are designed to linger and be hard to wash out of fabrics. Scent is marketed as a selling point, but exposure to these products has cumulative harmful effects, and more and more people are becoming sensitized to them. Specific scent ingredients are often considered proprietary and are not required to be disclosed on labels; some are proven neurotoxins, carcinogens, and hormone disruptors. [Research](#) has shown that around 30% of people already experience health problems from exposure to fragranced products.

Some of these chemically injured people are members of our dance and music communities who would really love to be able to participate in music, song, and dance activities. But when they enter a dance or music space full of ambient fragrances—people wearing fragrances, scented deodorants and hair products, clothing heavily scented from laundry products, even scented hand soap and sanitizer—they cannot breathe or think clearly, and trying to simply enjoy singing, dancing, or playing becomes dangerous and impossible for them. The symptoms these products cause are intense and can last long after an exposure, so it's not just a matter of getting through an uncomfortable evening.

Dancing, more than many other activities, puts sensitized people at even greater risk of harmful exposure when scents are present because of *proximity* and *activity*. Contra and English dancing put numerous other people close to you; you can't simply choose a fragrance-free partner and stay safe. Everyone is being physically active, which causes deeper and more frequent breathing in of fragrances, and it causes sweating, which makes laundry products and deodorants off-gas much more than if the wearers were sitting still. That effect is multiplied by all the scent-wearing people at a given dance. It creates a toxic environment for everyone, and is a significant barrier to access for those who have become sensitized.

The chemical environment at an event is truly an issue of access. Disabilities that are not obviously apparent to others, often called *invisible disabilities*, are real and valid disabilities that create actual barriers to equal access. A person who can't breathe inside a space, or who will be ill for days after being there if they try to tough it out despite exposure, is effectively as barred from access as a person who can't get in because of stairs with no ramps or elevators. Because they care about equity and access, more and more dance communities, camps, and events are going fragrance-free, notably many on the West Coast of the U.S., and Pinewoods Camp.

If you're not currently aware of being affected by scents, you may not even notice the chemicals that impact those who have sensitivity, so you may be surprised and upset to be told your scents are problematic. Sensitized people have been through a lot, and if they have to approach you about a scent that's causing them distress, they're probably already feeling unwell and unsafe. They are likely filled with adrenaline from their physiological reaction to the scents, their stress about having to deal with it *again* (they've had this conversation many times before, and it has often not gone well), and concern about your potential reaction to their request and the impact on your relationship. They have often been invalidated, disbelieved, judged, and shamed for their reactions to scents, and they dread experiencing that yet again.

On the other side, it's emotionally difficult to hear that your use of a product you enjoy or barely notice the scent of is harming someone else. You may really like some scented products and be very attached to them, or feel some sense of identity from using them, and your feelings are valid too. It's reasonable to feel upset if someone is distressed by you just living your life and using your usual products. You're not bad for having been unaware of this issue, and as discussed above, we all live in a culture that is steeped in advertising to

create a perceived need and expectation for buying and using scented products.

Making the changes necessary to remove scented products from dance environments (both in our facilities and on our bodies) is an important element of providing equitable access for everyone. Changing to fragrance-free products will have a learning curve and may require some effort at first. Emotions can run high on all sides of this issue. Depending on their situation and lifestyle, asking people to change to fragrance-free products can be a significant request.

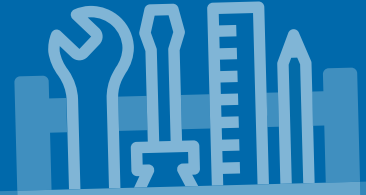
Every equity conversation can be challenging for all involved. No one wants to be excluded or harmed, and most people find it difficult to learn that their normal way of doing things is actually harmful and to be asked to make changes, so there may be some uncomfortable moments along the way. But that discomfort is unlikely to be a barrier to access, while the presence of scented products is a significant barrier to access for those who suffer from sensitivities. Valuing equity calls on us to think and learn about barriers to access, and to do what we can to mitigate them so that everyone who would like to participate in our events is able to do so.

This guide will provide resources, links, checklists, and suggestions for ways to keep your dance environments as accessible as possible to those who are sensitized to fragrances. We welcome your feedback about anything from broken links to ways it could be improved, things we've missed, how your efforts are going, etc.

Endnote

More people than can be named here have contributed significantly to the process of formulating and compiling this guide, but we want to especially acknowledge Morna Leonard, Kathryn Bowman, Lindsey Dono, and Amy Wimmer.

This guide is offered with tremendous gratitude to and compassion for those who are on the difficult journey of living with MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity) and other invisible chronic illnesses which are often misunderstood and marginalized, and with great appreciation for all those who strive to make our participatory dance and music communities welcoming and accessible to all.



**Part
7c**

Resources for Implementing a Fragrance-free Policy

Acknowledgements

Produced by the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Compiled/written by Marni Rachmiel, with major contributions from Morna Leonard, Kathryn Bowman, Lindsey Dono, and Amy Wimmer. Writing and editing support from members of the task group. Published March 2024.

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Introduction

[Research has shown that around 30% of people experience health problems from exposure to fragranced products.](#) Chemical sensitivity is an invisible disability that can cause intense reactions to everyday products, creating a barrier to participation in public events. Please see the accompanying resource, *Scents and Access in Dance Spaces: An Introduction*, for an in-depth discussion of this problem and why it is an issue for music, dance, and song communities.

While it is not possible to keep any public event 100% fragrance-free, a lot can be done to keep chemical exposures to a minimum. Examples include checking your venues for scented products and doing all you can to remove, avoid, or mitigate these; providing safe products for everyone to use during your events; sharing information about safer practices and products with your community; making your policies clear; and making clear, kind requests for cooperation. If/when your group decides to adopt a fragrance-free policy, here are some suggestions for how to implement that commitment to accessibility.

Educate dancers and adopt guidelines and policies

Be clear that chemical sensitivity is a real though invisible disability. If you value being accessible to all, this is an important and often neglected context. Working toward a fragrance-free environment is like having elevators and ramps and braille plates in elevators (but a lot less expensive).

It is important to educate dancers that refraining from using perfumes or colognes is just a first step. Many other products can be every bit as problematic, but might not occur to people who are trying to be helpful. Try to educate your community to take chemical sensitivities seriously, to believe what people say they experience even if your experience is different, and to respond with compassion.

- Understand that different people react badly to different things. Some sensitive people may be tolerant of some scents and intolerant of others. There is wide variation between individual sensitivities. While one sensitive person you know may be fine with something like lavender or peppermint essential oil, another may have a severe reaction to even natural scents. A general fragrance-free policy is the most accessible approach.
- Ask everyone to check the products they use and avoid scented products on their bodies and clothing when coming to dance. Explain the scope of what is needed online and in written materials. Make announcements to refer to the detailed information. (See below for checklists and suggestions for safer products.)

- **Tips for communicating about fragrance-related access issues:**

- Please don't take offense or take it personally when someone has a reaction to a product you are using. **It's pretty common for a dancer, even someone who has their own sensitivities to not even notice something with a scent that is problematic for someone else.** "I'm sorry, but I can't dance with you/swing with you/stand close to you, I'm having a reaction to some kind of product you're using," is not an insult or attack; it's a boundary and a matter of health.
- Understand that it can be scary and distressing to have to tell someone that you are reacting to something they've used and that you need space from them. No one wants to be rude or give offense, and people with chemical sensitivities and other invisible disabilities have already had too many experiences of being disbelieved and criticized. It's natural to feel a little defensive, but as with any boundary issue, don't ever invalidate someone communicating to you about their experience and needs. An angry "No, it's not!" or "No, I didn't!" really adds to the distress. A good response is something like "I didn't realize, I'm sorry. Thank you for telling me," and give them space or let them take space from you.
- People who have become severely chemically sensitive can experience extremely difficult reactions to exposure, including severe breathing difficulties, cognitive impairment, confusion, anxiety, etc. People can be intensely knocked out and feel ill for days from a bad exposure. Please understand what is at stake for them and what they may already be experiencing by the time they need to step away from you. Imagine a time when you felt horribly ill and realize that they may feel this way, or are trying desperately to avoid feeling this way yet again, perhaps for long after an exposure. Try to empathize with how upsetting, isolating, and discouraging it is for them to be met with triggers for this distress in so many social settings.
- Use your knowledge of your dancers and your regional and local community culture to craft how to most effectively approach people whose fragrance use is causing an obstacle to access.

More things to keep in mind as you transition to a new policy:

- If you have chemically sensitive dancers who show up but still are exposed to more scents than they can handle, be sure they know who they can talk to.
- If there are only a few people wearing scents, they can be approached individually, and kindly asked if, by washing, they might be able to lessen or remove the fragrance.

- If a new dancer brings fragrance reactions to your attention, help them understand the normative ways they can try to protect themselves (e.g. switch lines as needed, if it's just a few people they're reacting to; give them polite scripts to use like "Sorry, I'd be happy to dance with you but unfortunately I'm reacting to some kind of scented product you're using so I can't, maybe another time." Or, "I'm feeling out of breath/dizzy, could we skip the swing?")
- If a dancer has to leave because of fragrances, try to respond in a way that does not further marginalize or "other" them (validate their experience, apologize that your dance wasn't accessible this time, tell them your group is working on the problem and encourage them to stay in touch/try again), and refund their money so they at least didn't have to pay cash to be disappointed and excluded. You might give them a coupon for a free admission in the future to help them try again down the road and feel that you really do want them to feel welcome at your dance.

On-site implementation tips

Regular series

Planning before the dance

Have someone with good awareness of these issues assess your location for accessibility. Some things will be out of your control, especially in a rented hall with other users.

- Halls with more soft surfaces (carpets, curtains, upholstery, etc.) may be harder to make safe than halls with harder surfaces. Some halls have other users who feel the need to use plug-ins.
- When possible, let hall managers know of your intent to be more accessible to the chemically sensitive community members. Point out that this is a legitimate ADA/accessibility issue. Ask that air fresheners not be used. Ask that the bathrooms not have fragrance dispensers/air fresheners.
- Let facilities know you'll provide your own soap, and be prepared to share information if they're interested.
- Have volunteers assigned to get, store, set up, and clean up your fragrance-free products, sink/dispenser signage, etc.

It helps to have one or two people able and prepared to talk to people who are identified as wearing fragrances. (You don't want the chemically sensitive person doing this, as it puts them at added risk, and their

distress can make the other person feel defensive.) Reach out to people with gentle energy who are well-liked and respected in your community, and ask if they would be ambassadors for accessibility. Be sure these folks are as fragrance-free as possible, so the affected dancers can safely approach them to ask for help communicating.

Announcements during the dance

Either the caller or an organizer should mention the fragrance policy along with announcements about other safety/protocol information. Suggested wording can be:

“We have a number of community members with chemical sensitivities. In order for everyone to be able to dance safely, we try to be as fragrance-free as possible. Please help us in this by switching to fragrance-free products. You’ll find a flyer over there which has suggestions for alternatives and where to easily buy them.”

On website

If your dance maintains a website or social media presence, mention the fragrance policy. Feel free to link to these documents from our toolkit.

- A truly accommodating policy will have wording such as “Please help us keep these events fragrance-free so that all may dance safely,” rather than “If you choose to wear perfume or other fragrances, use a light hand.” (Remember that any use of fragrance, even a small amount or “natural” fragrances/essential oils may still be a barrier to access for dancers who are severely sensitized.) There are examples in the [Fragrance-free Products](#) document.

In facilities

- In the bathrooms and kitchen—at *all* sinks used by dancers—provide fragrance-free soaps.
- Keep folks from using wall dispensers by taping off/taping paper towels over the front to prevent automatic usage. You might write **“Do Not Use”** on the paper.
- Additional tips for fragrance-free hand washing supplies:
 - Fragrance-free soap in foaming soap pumps uses less soap.
 - Buying in bulk can be cheaper, but gallon jugs of fragrance-free liquid soap may go rancid before they are used up, so smaller quantities may be better.

- The foaming pumps take a 3:1 ratio of water to soap. When refilling the pump, put the water in first, then the soap, so it doesn't foam up and make a mess/waste soap.
- Use only pumps that were new or came with fragrance-free soap. Bottles that formerly held scented soaps will always contaminate soap with fragrance.
- If the hall has scented soaps in bottles, just hide those bottles and put them back out after the dance.
- If your dance provides hand sanitizer gel, there are several fragrance-free versions available.
 - Only buy hand sanitizers labeled fragrance-free. Purell and other common mainstream hand sanitizers have problematic scents.
 - A great fragrance-free hand sanitizer is 3M's Avaguard D. It's widely available at Amazon and many medical supply websites.
https://www.3m.com/3M/en_US/p/d/b00041952/
<https://www.amazon.com/Avagard-Healthcare-Sanitizer-Moisturizer-Fluid/dp/B0043E6UF8>
 There are others in the [product listings](#).
 - If you put hand lotion in bathrooms or on your welcome table, make sure that it's fragrance-free.

Signage

Signs at the welcome table and in the bathrooms can help to educate your dancers. You can use the information and suggestions in this set of documents to create signs letting dancers know about your fragrance-free policy and asking them to please avoid fragrances so everyone can participate.

Resources for participants

- Put copies of [this educational overview](#) and this [list of product suggestions](#) on your flyer table.

Residential camps

- Make sure your contact person at the camp facility is aware of fragrance issues and makes a thorough assessment of accessibility, ideally before registration starts. Go over the types of products used, ventilation, etc.
 - Where possible, advocate with the facility for improvements to accessibility around fragrances—not using plug-ins, substituting fragrance-free cleaning solutions, etc.

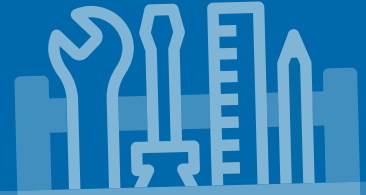
- Be realistic and transparent about access on your camp website so affected participants know the situation in advance and can choose or ask follow-up questions accordingly.
- Think about access in lodgings as well as in dining/dancing/music areas.
 - Does everyone bring their own bedding? If any bedding is provided (either by the facility or local dancers for out-of-town visitors), check on fragrance accessibility. Request fragrance-free detergent and that no fabric softener or dryer sheets, even unscented, be used.
- Be aware of and transparent about ventilation in all spaces. Being able to open windows for fresh air can make a big difference.
- Some chemically sensitive dancers may want to bring their own tent or camper. Try to accommodate access needs when possible.
- Make attendees aware of fragrance-free policy and expectations and ask them not to bring any scented products to camp.
 - On website
 - In pre-camp letter
 - In camp orientation, explain what is and is not to be used, any details about what is on site to avoid (built-in dispensers, scented hand sanitizer the camp may provide), how to find safe products, where to look/who to ask for refills
- Provide fragrance-free products: hand and shower soap, shampoo, conditioner, hand lotion, hand sanitizer, dish soap, etc. so individual dancers don't have to try to figure it out.
 - This takes advance planning—assessing how much is needed, getting supplies and containers, portioning/filling, labeling. Don't leave til the last minute.
 - Remember to make it someone's job to check and refill products throughout the camp as needed. It's not one-and-done.
 - Remember to assign retrieval and cleanup/storage of fragrance-free products/supplies in advance.
- Have someone who's tuned in to these issues available to consult with dancers who have questions.

In-town dance weekends

- Make sure your contact person with the facility is aware of fragrance issues and makes a thorough assessment of accessibility, ideally before registration starts. Go over the types of products used, ventilation, etc.
 - Where possible, advocate with the facility for improvements to accessibility around fragrances: not using plug-ins or scented sprays, substituting fragrance-free cleaning solutions, etc.
 - See details under “Regular dance series” above for planning ahead, providing fragrance-free products for handwashing and sanitizing, etc., and making sure scented products at the facility aren’t accidentally used.
- Are walk-ins allowed or not?
 - It is easier to keep an event safe for chemically sensitive dancers if pre-registration precludes entry at the door.
- Hand washing away from the hall
 - If your dancers leave the facility for meal breaks, remind them that if the soaps/hand sanitizers they encounter in public restrooms are scented, they could come back carrying extremely problematic scents that have been known to cause severely sensitized dancers to have to leave, and to try to avoid or mitigate this as best they can. This can be a dilemma, as hygiene is more important than ever for everyone’s wellbeing. If your event is trying to be accessible to dancers who are severely sensitive, we recommend you have a problem-solving conversation in advance and try to discuss options that could work for everyone.
 - Some dancers with multiple chemical sensitivity have asked people to avoid scented soaps when out and instead wash vigorously with just hot water, waiting to wash thoroughly with fragrance-free soap on returning to the venue.
 - Some may be willing and able to help provide small portable “take-out” hand washing kits for dancers who are going to restaurants to use if needed.
 - Some organizers may try to address the dilemma by asking one dance line, perhaps closest to open windows, be avoided after a meal break by those who had to use scented soaps while out, to try to provide a safer line for sensitive dancers to try to dance in.

Final thoughts

We are grateful for all of the hard work that organizers and community members have dedicated to making dances accessible to the significant fraction of our population who suffer chemical sensitivities. We are aware that handling chemical sensitivities can feel like yet another hurdle for organizers, who already have a lot to handle and keep track of. We hope by providing the information in this and the other associated documents we can make it a little easier for you to increase the accessibility of your dance and music events. Thank you for your consideration!



**Part
7D**

Fragrance-Free Products

Acknowledgements

Produced by the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group: Written/edited by Marni Rachmiel, with significant contributions from Morna Leonard, Kathryn Bowman, Lindsey Dono, and Amy Wimmer. Writing and editing support from Diane Silver. Published March 2024.

Research has shown that around 30% of people experience health problems from exposure to fragranced products. Chemical sensitivity is an invisible disability that makes the mainstream environment toxic and creates a barrier to participation in public events.

This task group aims to provide a fragrance-free (FF) environment in order to eliminate (or at least minimize) this barrier for our participants who have chemical sensitivities. Everyone's cooperation is needed to accomplish this. The difficulties mostly come from personal care products used by other participants, including common brands of deodorant, soap, shampoo, laundry detergent, etc., and cleaning/scent products used in facilities.

While it may feel like an imposition to be asked to change your favorite brand of these products, this task group is asking that you view this as an act of compassion and inclusion to enable chemically sensitive people to enjoy our dances.

In hopes that you are willing to be part of the solution to this problem, here are some tips for avoiding scented products and a list of fragrance-free products that have been recommended by dancers with this disability. Please join this task group in transitioning to FF choices and help change the cultural norm of using scented products.

Types of products to check for fragrance ingredients (look for fragrance-free versions and read labels)

(adapted from <https://seriouslysensitivetopollution.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/2019-fragrance-free-checklist-final1.pdf>)

If product names/descriptions use words like fresh, fruity, flowers, spices, herbs, mountains, oceans, breezes, emotions, etc., they definitely have fragrance added. Some products that say unscented or fragrance-free on the front may still contain fragrances when you check the ingredient list. Usually they mask or disguise the smell of other ingredients, but to people who have to avoid fragrances, they are just as harmful.

Some ways fragrances are listed in ingredients (this may not be a complete list):

- Fragrance
- Scent
- Parfum/perfume
- Masking scent
- Aroma
- Essential oils (even certified organic, pure, therapeutic grade EOs are not fragrance-free)

Note: There is no legal requirement to disclose individual fragrance ingredients. Some voluntary disclosures list some but not all the ingredients, and some companies use chemical names instead of disclosing them as fragrance ingredients.

Some of the most impactful chemicals in dance environments:

Body care products:

- Soap—hand soap, body wash/soap, hand sanitizer
- Hair products—shampoo, conditioner, hairspray/gel
- Lotions/moisturizers/creams
- Deodorant/antiperspirant
 - Can be especially prone to off-gassing badly when dancers sweat
- Any cologne, perfume, body spray, essential oils, etc.
- Sunscreen and insect repellent (especially at camps)
- Makeup

Clothing (laundry products and other scent issues):

- Detergent
- Dryer sheets and fabric softeners
 - These are usually highly problematic even when not fragranced, so it's best to skip using them altogether.
 - Even unscented versions are full of toxic chemicals, and they are designed to cling to fabric; very hard to get out once they've been used.
 - Using shared laundry facilities where these have been used can badly contaminate clothing, even if you don't use them yourself! They cling to surfaces inside the machines.
 - If you feel the need for fabric softener, add a quarter cup of baking soda or a half cup of white vinegar to the wash during the rinse cycle.
- Dry cleaning (especially for balls and other costume dances)
 - Dry cleaning solvents are extremely toxic. Please use non-toxic dry cleaners for dance outfits if at all possible. Plan ahead to air out dry-cleaned items significantly after cleaning.
- Febreze
 - It does not remove odors as advertised; it masks them with a (chemically) worse one.
- Cigarette smoke
 - Clings to hair and clothing
- Products that emit fragrances can cling to your hair, body, and clothing like cigarette smoke but worse:
 - Home or car air fresheners—spray, solid, plug-in, etc.
 - Often found in taxis, Lyft/Uber cars, etc.
 - Scented candles or wax melts
 - Incense
 - Diffused essential oils
 - Room sprays
 - Cleaning products
- Mildew
 - Clothing left to sit in a washer too long before being dried can develop an unbearable odor of mildew, which will linger through subsequent washings, and be badly exacerbated when the wearer sweats while dancing. Rewashing in the hottest water the garments will tolerate and trying vinegar and/or baking soda may help. Often the people wearing mildewy shirts are not aware.

What can we use?

Here is a **partial** list of products shared by some chemically sensitive folks as safe or safer for them. It's important to check with individuals, as reactions can vary. This listing is far from complete, there are actually a lot more fragrance-free options than it is possible to list here!

Note: Product formulation, availability, and sources are always subject to change, so make sure to check ingredient lists. Searching “fragrance-free” online is a good place to start, but be aware that some of the results will not actually be fragrance-free. The search algorithms are not reliable, so check each product. And some mainstream products that now make “free and clear” versions, like Tide and Dawn, while better than the scented versions, are still likely to cause problems, so they are best avoided if you can find other alternatives (see list).

Most of the listed items can be found on Amazon, vitacost.com, iherb.com, and Swansonvitamins.com, among other sources. Whole Foods 365 products' fragrance-free versions have been okay for many. Local natural groceries/health food stores/co-ops are likely sources for finding safe, locally made products; just be sure to check that they're fragrance-free.

Liquid soap for hand-washing at dances and camps:

- Dr. Bronner's baby mild or other fragrance-free liquid castile soap, as available
- Notes:
 - Be aware that a gallon jug is likely to go rancid before being used up
 - The foaming pumps take a 3:1 ratio of water to soap. When refilling the pump, put the water in first, then the soap, so it doesn't foam up and make a mess/waste soap.
 - Use only pumps that were new or came with fragrance-free soap. Bottles that formerly held scented soaps will always contaminate FF soap with trace chemicals.

Bath soap/shower gel:

- Fragrance-free bar soaps
- Dr. Bronner's baby mild bar and liquid
- Dr. Bronner's baby unscented sugar soap (less drying than the castile)
<https://www.amazon.com/Dr-Bronners-Baby-Unscented-Gift/dp/B075ZZKX82/>
- Jason fragrance-free sensitive skin body wash
<https://www.amazon.com/Jason-Fragrance-Free-Sensitive-Skin/dp/B095XKGJHB/>
- Desert Essence fragrance-free body wash

<https://www.amazon.com/Desert-Essence-Fragrance-Fluid-Ounce/dp/B002G1XA08/>

- Nutri-Biotic fragrance-free shower gel

<https://www.amazon.com/NutriBiotic-Fragrance-Moisturizing-Botanical-Citricidal/dp/B08GXXPRHK/>

Hair products:

- Desert Essence fragrance-free shampoo and conditioner

<https://www.amazon.com/Desert-Essence-Fragrance-Free-Conditioner/dp/B0017QSW92/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Desert-Essence-0428409-Organics-Fragrance/dp/B0019GZCYI/>

- Stonybrook Botanicals oil and fragrance-free shampoo and conditioner

<https://www.amazon.com/Shampoo-Oil-Fragrance-Free-16-oz/dp/B001339RX4/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Stony-Brook-Conditioner-Unscented-Fluid/dp/B000PILH9K/>

- Vanicream Free & Clear hair shampoo; also conditioner, hair spray, hair gel, liquid cleanser

<https://www.amazon.com/Pharmaceutical-Specialties-Shampoo-Sensitive-fragrance/dp/B0006FMK98/>

- CeraVe baby wash and shampoo; also lotions and other products—be sure they're marked fragrance-free

<https://www.amazon.com/CeraVe-30187222001-Baby-Wash-Shampoo/dp/B00JF3S29Y/>

- Plain (no scents added) aloe vera gel makes an excellent hair styling product, and is good for sunburn too; a couple of many options:

<https://www.amazon.com/Raslok-Moisturizing-Hydrating-Soothing-Non-Sticky/dp/B08XVR37TP/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Raslok-Moisturizing-Hydrating-Soothing-Non-Sticky/dp/B0BVRN1MZ3/>

- Jessicurl unscented full range of hair products especially for curly hair

jessicurl.com, select “no fragrance”

Hand sanitizer:

- 3M Avagard D

<https://www.amazon.com/Healthcare-Sanitizer-Hand-Avagard-Moisturizer/dp/B00GG56KZ2/>

Also available in personal sizes

- Babyganics alcohol-free fragrance-free sanitizer

<https://www.amazon.com/Babyganics-Alcohol-Free-Sanitizer-Fragrance-1-69-Ounce/dp/B00G3Y1BX2/>

- CleanSmart hand sanitizer

<https://www.amazon.com/CleanSmart-Antimicrobial-Cleanser-Bottle-Alcohol-Free/dp/B00GX25ZK4/>

- Hydra Pearl hand sanitizer

<https://www.amazon.com/Hydra-Pearl-Hand-Sanitizer-Pump/dp/B08FCTRGDQ/>



Cleaning products (including laundry):

- CleanSmart—all products are the same stuff, multipurpose use. Also available in small spray bottles for personal hand sanitizer. Good general disinfectant; skin and fabric safe.
<https://www.amazon.com/stores/CleanSmart%E2%84%A2/page/26720F9D-B0A8-4FDD-BC88-B07C10A2FB89>
- Ecover Zero fragrance-free products—dish soap, dishwasher tablets, laundry products (more available in UK than US)
<https://www.ecover.com/ecover-products/ecover-zero/>
- Bon Ami unscented powder cleanser
<https://www.amazon.com/Bon-Ami-Polishing-Cleanser-Powder/dp/B01LWSJR02/>
- EnviroKlenz laundry deodorizer, helpful for stripping scents out of fabrics and machines
<https://enviroklenz.com/laundry/>
<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=enviroklenz+laundry>
- SilverWorks laundry deodorizer sheets—fragrance-free and help remove odors from fabrics
<https://www.amazon.com/Laundry-Odor-Eliminator-Strong-Deodorizer/dp/B0BLD39388>
- Baking soda—helps get odors out of clothing, and reduces/eliminates static so replaces fabric softener
- Hydrogen peroxide—use in place of bleach
- White vinegar

Dish soap for kitchens:

Please do not use scented dish soaps. Dawn (especially Dawn Powerwash/Fairy in the UK) cause awful reactions to most sensitive folks.

- Ecover Zero
<https://www.amazon.com/Ecover-Zero-Dish-Fragrance-Ounce/dp/B00Q70Q2DG/>
- ECOS
<https://www.amazon.com/ECOS-Dish-Soap-Hypoallergenic-Biodegradable/dp/B00K0AU9DS/>

Deodorants/antiperspirants:

Do not get Arm & Hammer “unscented,” which lists fragrance as an ingredient. Deodorants are an especially important place to check the ingredients of products labeled “unscented” for fragrance.

- Kiss My Face fragrance-free
<https://www.amazon.com/Kiss-My-Face-Deodorant-Fragrance/dp/B0000532YB/>
- Nutribiotic
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00013Z1KU/>
- Trader Joe’s currently has a fragrance-free one (early 2024)
- Most crystal stone deodorants are fragrance-free
- Vanicream
<https://www.amazon.com/Vanicream-Aluminum-Free-Deodorant-Sensitive-Gluten-Free/dp/B07BKCL-9RR/>

Lotion/moisturizer:

- Lubriderm fragrance-free
<https://www.amazon.com/Lubriderm-Moisture-Lotion-Fragrance-Free-Normal/dp/B075G3RJDZ/>
- Aveeno fragrance-free
<https://www.amazon.com/Aveeno-Moisturizing-Soothing-Emollients-Fragrance-Free/dp/B001459IEE/>
- Desert Essence fragrance-free
<https://www.amazon.com/DESERT-ESSENCE-HAND-BODY-FRAG/dp/B001E14P3W/>
- Vanicream fragrance-free
<https://www.amazon.com/Vanicream-Sensitive-Fragrance-Parabens-Formaldehyde/dp/B003XWG880/>
<https://www.amazon.com/Vanicream-Moisturizing-Sensitive-Preservative-Dermatologist/dp/B01MUQDBOL/>
- Eucerin fragrance-free (travel size linked; there are larger sizes too)
<https://www.amazon.com/Eucerin-Original-Healing-Soothing-Fragrance/dp/B019VK0NJM/>
- Alba Botanica fragrance-free
- Trader Joe’s sometime has fragrance-free products (in early 2024, there’s a fragrance-free body butter)

Sunscreen:

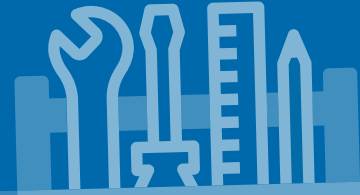
- Alba Botanica sensitive fragrance-free spray
<https://www.amazon.com/Alba-Botanica-Fragrance-Sensitive-Sunscreen/dp/B00UTLTC1S/>
- Alba Botanica Mineral Face fragrance-free
<https://www.amazon.com/Alba-Botanica-Sunscreen-Fragrance-Free-Biodegradable/dp/B0BM5D9SQ9/>

Insect Repellent:

This one is obviously tricky. Chemically sensitive folks will probably react badly to DEET. For some people, the essential oils used in non-DEET “natural” products may be very problematic, but for others may be ok. As always, try to ask the sensitized people in your community what they can best tolerate in situations where bug repellent would be problematic or dangerous to do without, e.g. high tick risk. There are a number of odorless products available now using Picaridin as the active ingredient. It claims to be odorless and as effective (or more effective) than DEET. Here is an article and some products:

<https://www.outdoors.org/resources/amc-outdoors/outdoor-resources/picaridin-vs-deet-which-is-the-best-insect-repellent/>

- Sawyer Products picaridin lotion
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00VV5KRD8>
- Ranger Ready picaridin spray
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07T9JFK2S/>



**Part
8**

How to Organize and/or Facilitate a Community Meeting that Will Leave Everyone Smiling

Whether you are writing organizing documents (values statement, mission, vision), or working through a controversial topic, if your model of governance is direct democracy or includes a community input process, there will be times when your community needs to meet to discuss an issue and perhaps arrive at a decision. Facilitating such a meeting is a skill we are not born with, but which can be developed. This guide provides some tips for facilitating a productive and positive meeting, or finding an outside facilitator to help you.

Acknowledgements

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CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group contributors: Diane Silver, Olivia Barry, Dorcas Hand, Nikki Herbst, Susie Lorand.

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How to Facilitate a Community Meeting

Note: There are a ton of resources available for learning to be a facilitator. (A few are listed on page 8.) This guide is certainly not comprehensive, and we do not wish to reinvent the wheel. This is an effort to synthesize and summarize some of the top lines from our efforts to gather resources in one place. We urge would-be facilitators to consider taking a workshop from professionals. But in a pinch, here are a few tips:

Define the topic

- Any discussion needs one or more seeds: a question to be answered or a proposal to be supported or challenged.
- Does your community have a number of issues that need to be discussed? If so, are they interrelated and hard to separate, or can you address them one at a time?
 - Whichever strategy seems best, make sure participants know ahead of time what the scope of the discussion will be, in order to keep things focused. If someone goes off on a tangent, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to redirect the discussion back to the topic at hand. It is okay (in fact, needed!) to acknowledge the tangential views expressed, and then park them to be picked up later.

Define the goal

- Why are you having this discussion? How will you know when you're done?
Is the goal to arrive at an actionable decision, or is it simply to provide a forum for participants to air perspectives, positions, and grievances?

For example:

- Actionable decision:
 - What style of music or dancing the group, or a particular event, will focus on—whether a particular event is all one style (squares, contras) or an evening of mixed styles
 - Whether or not to have an advanced dance or jam
 - Whether a pub sing is strictly traditional songs from some agreed repertoire, or if modern pop songs are also welcome

- What role terminology will be used at the group’s events (also see the bonus guide on role terminology)
- What will be our criteria for banning someone from future participation?

Or:

- Forum for discussion:
 - How can we increase diversity at our events, and is this even something we should/want to do? Is this a problem or not?
 - Do we want to expand our mission to include something new? (e.g., are we a recreational organization that produces events, or are we a community organization with goals related to some larger social benefit?) What are the pros and cons?
- How will your world be different after it has taken place?
 - We will all (all those attending) use the terminology we just agreed on
 - We’ll discover birds-of-a-feather groups, and continue the discussion in those
 - My group is going its own way, but I’d like to hear others’ thoughts
 - So that our decision is not completely unlike everyone else’s
 - In case there are points we hadn’t considered

Make sure everyone knows at the start what the end goal is.

Taken together, defining the topic and the goal can be understood as “framing the question.” This helps you structure the discussion and strategize how to get from here to there.

Define the participants

- Who are the stakeholders? Stakeholders are anyone who is affected by the final decision or course of action.
 - Stakeholders are historically viewed as primarily those whose cooperation will be needed to carry it out, because if they feel no commitment to the decision or action plan, they will have little internal motivation to pursue it. Success will then require external motivators (such as money or other rewards), or enforcement mechanisms. Voluntary cooperation based on internal motivation (buy-in) is far easier to implement.

- A social justice approach aims to pivot the limited view of stakeholders to also value, prioritize, and include those who will be affected by the decision(s) but who perhaps hold little power. You may not *need* their buy-in, but having it will result in greater peace in the community. If those with no power are not happy with a decision or course of action, discontent will fester.
- Brainstorm everyone who should be invited to be heard. Depending on the issue, stakeholders could include callers, musicians, sound techs, existing dancers, new dancers, dancers you've lost, people who do publicity, organizers, door-sitters (who have to explain your procedures or norms to people walking in), etc. What do you owe to each of these in terms of listening, giving weight to their concerns, and care in letting them know the final decision or course of action?

Define the timeframe

- If the goal is an actionable decision, it may require several hours. If questions arise that need time to be researched or if next steps are identified that need time to be carried out, the final resolution may require returning to the process in days or weeks. It can be useful to identify what you think the entire timeline for the process will look like, and to share ahead of time what the start and end times will be for a given session. Time limits can help you bite off manageable chunks of work, and they help ensure that participants don't become exhausted. You don't want to settle on a final resolution simply because everyone feels like they're being held hostage until you do and therefore they ultimately agree to something they are not really satisfied with. That will simply result in continued disagreement in the future.

Preparation for the convenors or organizers

- Physical space: A facilitated meeting is hard work. You're probably having it because there is some problem or big point of disagreement that needs to be discussed, so the atmosphere may be tense already. Being comfortable can help keep people in a positive frame of mind. Try to have comfortable seating, good lighting, comfortable temperature, etc.
- Refreshments always help, and they don't have to be fancy.
- Bathroom facilities
- Materials: Flip chart, pens & markers, Post-its, tape, etc.

Preparation for the facilitator, if you are doing your own facilitation. (If you're hiring an outside facilitator, they will have their own process.)

- Outline the flow of the discussion. Break the issue down into steps, or questions for consideration. Plan an outline for the total time available—how much time will you spend on each step or question?
- Think about criteria for the final decision (discussed more below).
- Try to recruit someone to be a scribe so that you can focus on facilitating rather than also taking notes.
- Prepare ground rules for participation.

Preparation for the participants

- Articles for everyone to read: Providing some basic background enables the group to come together with some common starting place or understanding of an issue.
- A survey for everyone to fill out: Getting some concrete input ahead of time can give you information about what people care about most and can give you, the facilitator, some ideas about which seeds will lead to a productive discussion and which will lead to an unproductive discussion. This can help you decide which topics to address together and which to save for later. (See “Define the topic,” above). For example:
 - What do participants value most about dancing? Choreography? Connection to each other? Connection to the past? Costume? Exercise? Improvisation? Getting it right? Style of music?
 - What role terminology do participants prefer: Historical? Traditional in this community for the last few decades? Gender-neutral? Particular terms (name them)?
- Understanding the range of differences among participants can help you plan for what will need discussion time, and where there is already pretty broad agreement.
- Maybe some other preparation work before the meeting.

Setting the Tone

Consider the possibility that participants share an interest in dancing and nothing else. Do not make pre-assumptions about shared values, shared political views, or other shared interests. Such common ground likely exists to some extent, but it is not universal. If there are strong underlying differences, especially in values or political views, it can be difficult to establish common vocabulary. It is important to make space to discover unshared assumptions, and to set ground rules for working well together.

Present ground rules that you have prepared ahead of time, or ask for a quick brainstorm from participants for ground rules for working well together. Some ideas are:

- Mutual respect: no interrupting, no shaming. Affirm the validity of other points of view, even if you disagree.
- Space for everyone. Step up, then step back.
- Respect and manage emotions. If you feel passionately about this topic, that's valuable. It's okay to use strong language, to yell or cry. Just don't yell at someone else. Direct your emotions toward the topic, not toward others. If others become emotional, give them space and support.

Structure for discussion

There are many options for structuring discussion, so this is just a brief overview. We recommend you consult some of the additional resources listed below.

- Who and what
 - Everybody all together, one topic at a time
 - Breakout groups, with different groups tackling different topics, and then reconvening and sharing ideas as a large group
- How
 - Popcorn style: just speak up when there's space
 - Hand-raising
 - Round-robin: going in order around the room
- These are important considerations because there will usually be some participants who are more assertive than others. You don't want to allow one (or a few) dominant people to shape the whole discussion, and you also don't want to shut anyone down or put anyone on the spot.

When things get heated or there are deep differences

When things really get fraught, you are moving from facilitation to conflict resolution. Conflict resolution and mediation are different skills from simply facilitating a discussion. Again, there are tons of existing resources on this topic. Some are listed below. We suggest taking a workshop or reading some of the suggested literature for more complete guidance. But again, in a pinch, here are some tips:

The real issue is, how do you handle dance/music politics, and how do you mend fractures?

Some methods and tactics that may be useful:

- Break up factions; quiet interventions before a meeting can help with this.
- Depersonalize the issues and don't acknowledge the factions. Talk about priorities and possibilities and don't talk about what divides people.
- Talk about the action (e.g., gender-neutral calling), not the people (e.g., "the people who like gender-neutral calling").
- Don't label anything with people's names or a group's name. Say instead, for example, "a group that uses gender-neutral calling reports..."
- Put ideas out anonymously and let people play with them.
- Figure out fun and playful ways to explore issues, knowing that the hard reality is that any decision will cause the loss of some people.
- Remain open to people surprising you.
- Show appreciation.
- Beware of ageism and any other presumptions.

Criteria for final decision or next steps

- Consensus
- Vote—what threshold to carry?
- Something else?

What considerations will drive your choice of priorities, among stakeholders, among things people care about, etc.? A final decision is likely to be a balance among competing preferences, so it can be helpful to think ahead of time about how you will identify that balance. A good test: how will you defend the final decision to people who complain about it?

One of the most important outcomes of a facilitated discussion is that in the end, everyone feels that they had the opportunity to express their views, that they were heard and respected, and that their priorities were considered (and are reflected) on par with everyone else's.

Problem solving and conflict resolution are a balancing act among competing interests, and the result is usually a compromise. For a compromise to work, each member has to feel that their wishes, if not granted, were at least taken into account, e.g. "You are giving up some of what you want so I can have some of what I want." The Quakers are good at this and have a useful tool, which is approximately, "I have heard all the points of view. I understand them and accept them as valid. I also believe that everyone has heard my point of view and accepted it as valid. I see this solution as the best balance available to us. I don't like it, but will stand aside: I will follow it, will not resist it and will not disparage it."

There is a balance between being true to your morals/fighting for justice and compromising to resolve conflict and move forward. The goal is to find that balance. We should not expect people to abandon their ideals, but when there are one or two holdouts against an otherwise accepted solution—especially if they are long-standing and respected participants—an organizer can ask them to stand aside. They are only likely to agree if they feel that their concerns were truly heard. This is especially applicable in the context of generational change and issues around tradition vs. the evolution of our music and dance activities.

Additional resources for learning how to facilitate a meeting yourself

- Many communities have a **community mediation center** of some kind, also sometimes called a dispute resolution center. Search online for one in your area.
 - *Note:* look for “community mediation” or “dispute resolution,” not legal mediation centers. Legal mediation involves lawyers to help individuals resolve legal disputes. Community mediation is for neighbor-to-neighbor issues.
 - Mediation centers often offer training in facilitation. If you or someone in your community are interested in developing this skill, this might be a worthwhile investment of time and money, rather than hiring an outside facilitator for just one time.
 - Through the [National Association for Community Mediation](#) (NAFCM), you can [search for a community mediation program](#) by city or state.
- **Braver Angels**
 - This is a nonprofit organization that brings together people across political divides (usually Democrats and Republicans). They have trainings on how to facilitate those meetings. There is a small fee to become a member (currently \$10-20). You apply to be a facilitator, and then they train you. Their process is focused on debating an issue. A proposal is posed (e.g., “building a wall will keep the U.S. safe and only legal immigration will take place”). A bipartisan leadership pair (one Democrat and one Republican) then facilitates the debate. They may pre-choose two people to start the debate, representing opposing views. There are ground rules for speaking (for example, no interrupting). The process forces people to really hear what others are saying. Many of these debates are online and free to view. It could be valuable to watch the process and see if you can apply it to a dance question. You could do it without the pre-lined-up speakers, just choose peo-

ple to speak. This could be a useful process for debating an issue within your community, but it does not necessarily lead to an actionable decision. As such, it might be appropriate for gathering community input for a decision-making model of an empowered board, and it could be a good first step for direct-democracy governance, but an additional step would be needed to make a final community decision.

- **Technology of Participation (ToP) Facilitation, from [The Institute of Cultural Affairs \(ICA\)](#)**

- “The Institute of Cultural Affairs International is a global community of non-profit organizations advancing human development worldwide. ICAI is about empowering an authentic and sustainable transformation of individuals, communities and organizations. [...] Processes of social change often engender conflict between those who want to perpetuate the past and those who want to change the future. We stand in the center in order to facilitate a transition, both honoring the past and building consensus for future change.”
- [ICA-USA](#) has identified the “moral issue of our times” to be climate change, and therefore focuses on “engaging communities, organizations and individuals in programs of sustainability.”
- [ICA-USA’s ToP methodology](#) “is an integrated set of facilitation methods, tools and approaches that foster authentic participation and meaningful collaboration.” “These methods [...] have been developed to help groups think, talk, and work together.”
- [ToP facilitator training](#) “will help you increase group participation, get more ideas into the mix and make group decision making more effective. It will provide you with practical tools for designing and orchestrating meetings as well as conversations and workshops. ToP courses include valuable tools, contexts and guidelines that will deepen your capacities as a facilitative leader. You will be able to create lively and effective teamwork, build respect and trust and encourage group creativity. ToP facilitation will help you focus the group’s energy on common goals, form consensus and build commitment.”
- “ToP facilitators are also able to design specific programs to train facilitative leaders that can be delivered on site in a community or organization.”

- Many colleges and universities offer degrees in peace and conflict studies. For facilitating problem-solving in your community, we recommend that you look for a workshop where you practice mediation skills, rather than a whole degree program, but if conflict resolution grabs your interest, a few such programs that we know of are:
 - Master’s program, UNC Greensboro
 - Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA, offers a range of peace and reconciliation classes
 - Certificate in Facilitation at Georgetown University
 - **Mediation training from [Community Mediation Maryland](#).** CMM’s process is more aimed at mediation between two people rather than a group. They focus on really considering power dynamics—making sure everyone is on equal footing and that people aren’t being policed. For example, participants are allowed to yell, curse, etc. There are no “tone police”. They emphasize that expression is cultural, and folks can express themselves however they want. The facilitator’s role is to find the nuggets of meaning or need or values in those tirades. This may be less applicable to a song or dance situation, but it is a source of facilitator training, so we’re including it here as an option.
-

Hiring an Outside Facilitator

Why hire an outside facilitator?

- Facilitation is a skill that improves with experience. If your community is facing a very controversial issue that is creating a lot of conflict and threatens to seriously damage the unity of the group and possibly the viability of your events (low turnout could eventually shut down a dance), it might be a worthwhile investment to bring in an expert to help you reach a resolution.
- A facilitator is supposed to remain neutral. They are like the referee or umpire in a sporting event. They must be committed to being fair to advocates on all sides of the issue, and the participants must trust that they are impartial and will remain so throughout the discussion. Organizers, board members, and other community leaders may very naturally wish to contribute their own opinions to the discussion and therefore may not want to take on the responsibility of being the facilitator, as they are, ideally, mutually exclusive roles.

How to find a facilitator in your community

- Again, search for a community mediation or dispute resolution center in your area. These organizations provide facilitation services and/or have a list of local professionals who have been trained in dispute resolution. (Look for “community mediation” or “dispute resolution,” *not* legal mediation centers).
- In addition to searching for an organization like a mediation center, you can simply search for individual mediators in your state. For example, mediate.com lists mediators by state and city. The mediators listed rank themselves based on criteria that a state mediation organization has established. Note that they pay to get listed. There are certifications, and certification costs money, so there could be lots more that are good but don't pay to become certified (which is why it's also good to check with a local mediation center). Conversely, the ones who pony up for certification may not be the most skilled, so once you identify someone, be sure to ask for references from past clients, and then check those references. Ask the former client about their experience with the mediator, while steering clear of the topic of the mediation. Here are a few prompts:
 - Did you feel that, in the end, your issue was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties?
 - What did you like about the mediator's style?
 - Was there anything you didn't like about their style?
 - Without divulging details of your issue, can you give any examples of how they helped you discuss your differences?
 - Would you hire this mediator/facilitator again?
- The ToP Network (mentioned above) “consists of over 130 licensed trainers and certified facilitators who deliver facilitation services and training across the nation.” [Certified ToP facilitators around the country, including the U.S. and Canada, are listed here.](#)

Additional Resources

The Mediator's Handbook, by Jenny Beer and Caroline Packard, currently in its fourth edition, available on Amazon.

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen
This is aimed at individuals for how to take part in a difficult conversation. Available new or used online, and is probably in most libraries.

Cool Tools for Hot Topics: Group Tools to Facilitate Meetings When Things Are Hot, by Ron Kraybill and Evelyn Wright

This is directed at meeting facilitators and has a lot of practical tools. Published by The Little Books of Justice & Peacebuilding. \$5 or \$6 online, from a variety of vendors (just search).