

# **Festival “How To” Book**



**Presented by the  
California  
Square Dance  
Council**

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## **WHAT IS A FESTIVAL?**

Generally, a “festival” is a multi-day dance event hosted by a state, regional, or local dance association. It is typically an annual event that serves to promote the organization, provide a fun time for local dancers, attract other dancers from out of the area, and raise income for the association.

### **FIRST THINGS FIRST - WHAT’S YOUR PURPOSE?**

Before you start to plan for a festival, you need to understand the purpose of your event. There are many different approaches that can be taken when planning a festival, depending on your purpose. Some possible purposes you may want to consider are:

- Providing income to the Association
- Providing for a FUN level dance for a range of dancers
- Providing a high level of dancing for a particular type or level of dancer
- Attracting dancers from out of your area
- Promoting your local callers to dancers outside your local area
- Supporting your local club callers
- Promoting Square Dancing to the general public

Your purpose should be decided by the organization that is sponsoring the festival - not by the chairman alone. If the chairman makes the decision and is not supported by the sponsoring organization, then there may be a lot of questioning and very little help. This is a critical area that few organizations want to take time to do correctly. If you have a set of guidelines that clearly specify the purpose of your festival (not some generic statement like "Support Square Dancing"), then you have a head start on focusing the organization. You can choose a few different areas and combine them, but they need to be prioritized so that all are working for the same goal. Be careful, in that some of the purposes are mutually exclusive and cannot be combined!

The purpose of your festival will drive your decisions as you plan your festival. If you choose "provide income" as your primary purpose, then you need to concentrate on making money - keep the costs down and the income high. Everything you do should be weighed against the cost of that item to determine the benefit it will have in gaining more income. Additionally, you need to think about what will attract enough dancers to meet your goal – is it big name callers or a specific level of dancing or a lot of variety? Conversely, if your desire is to provide a "FUN level dance", the opposite is true - you need to look at everything that you do in light of its enjoyment value to the dancers. Of course, there is some overlap - if the dancers don't enjoy themselves, they won't be back (and you lose money), but there are many different types of enjoyment that must be considered. If you look at your organization as a "service company" you can see the better the service, the better the return. Some extra service will be worth a little extra money, but if your prices are too high then dancers may go elsewhere.

Now that you have a specific purpose for your festival, you need to look at the type of program that will satisfy that purpose. Look at which type dancer you wish to please and the dancing they enjoy, then develop your program to please the majority of those dancers. In today's environment, don't be afraid to "downsize" the festival, but keep in mind the purpose of your event. A small festival can still be profitable and can provide an enjoyable weekend, if you concentrate on reducing the overhead for the festival.

## **WHAT ARE THE MAIN THINGS I NEED TO CONSIDER?**

### **FESTIVAL COMMITTEE**

All festivals need a good chairman supported by a dedicated and energetic committee. A good chairman will delegate responsibilities while maintaining the overall leadership and keeping in mind the “big picture” of the festival operations. The number of committee positions will depend in part on the complexity of your festival and the number of different activities you have planned. General committee categories include:

1. **Publicity and Promotions:** These are the folks responsible for coordinating the development and distribution of promotional materials such as flyers, display boards, media releases, social media posts, and the like. This committee might also be responsible for arranging visitations to other dances to distribute fliers and sell ribbons.
2. **Programming:** These are the people responsible for scheduling all the dance-related activities, including assigning callers and cuers to halls and time slots, determining sessions such as teaches or workshops, and allocating times for special activities such as educational programs or exhibitions.
3. **Registration and Housing:** These folks will handle registration (including pre-registration and door registration), identify and coordinate with a host hotel if applicable, and coordinate RV camping.
4. **Facilities and Services:** These people will allocate facility space and support any facility-related needs such as tables, chairs, and stages; oversee the sound contract and ensure communication with the sound contractors during the event; support communication across the committee and event venues (e.g., via cell phones or walkie-talkies); ensure there is water available at all times in each hall; and more. They may also be responsible for activities such as lost and found, first aid, and other related tasks.
5. **Finance/Business:** This includes your festival treasurer as well as other staff to support vendors, fund-raising activities such as raffles or silent auctions, and the like. Your treasurer and/or business chair will oversee all contracts under the supervision of the general chairman, and will coordinate reimbursements for expenses as well as payment for contracted staff and facilities.
6. **Social and Special Events:** These folks help add to the fun of the event by coordinating activities such as ceremonies (e.g., a Saturday night grand march and/or opening ceremony), educational panels, exhibitions, fashion show, and any other special events you might consider adding to your festival.

Remember that your committee members are all volunteers so honor their time by not meeting unnecessarily. Some festivals have an organizing and budgeting meeting a year or so in advance of their event, then meet in person or electronically every one to two months. Meetings may be more frequent as the event gets closer. It is important to maintain communication among the different committees. For example, the people responsible for vendors and those coordinating the educational programs need to communicate with the facilities chair regarding how their areas need to be set up, while the exhibition chair needs to coordinate with the sound staff to ensure appropriate equipment. While everyone doesn't need to know everything about the other committees (except, of course, the chairman), communication amongst committees is extremely helpful.

### **LENGTH OF EVENT**

While most festivals have traditionally been two to three day affairs (Friday evening / Saturday / Sunday morning), many associations are re-thinking this concept based on facility and staff costs, number of dancers, registration fees, and other considerations. The length of the event should be connected to your purpose and the interests and commitment of the dancers expected to attend. If the primary purpose is the enjoyment of the dancers, then talking with the anticipated attendees about how much dancing they expect to do and how much time they have to commit can help you determine the best length for your festival. If the purpose is to bring income into your association, then expenses vs. revenue is a primary consideration.

## BUDGETING YOUR EVENT

A budget is essential for a successful festival. While you can't anticipate every eventuality, you can project both income and expenses. Based on your purpose, consider:

Income Sources	Major Expense Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration Fees</li> <li>• Advertising Sales (e.g., program book ads, advertising boards)</li> <li>• Vendor Booth Rental</li> <li>• RV Parking Fees</li> <li>• Prize Ticket Sales or Auctions (e.g., raffle prizes, "split the pot" tickets, silent auctions) <i>[NOTE: raffles, 50/50 drawings, and similar activities should be reviewed under federal or state tax guidelines to ensure they are legal as planned.]</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilities (halls, tables &amp; chairs, flooring, RV parking costs, etc.)</li> <li>• Staff: Callers &amp; Cuers (contract costs plus any compensation for hotel rooms, travel expenses, etc.)</li> <li>• Publicity (flyers, ads, etc.)</li> <li>• ASCAP/BMI Fees</li> <li>• Sound Contract</li> <li>• First Aid (may be contracted or donated)</li> <li>• Other Expenses such as Ribbons, Decorations, Postage, Hospitality, etc.</li> </ul>

Be realistic in developing your budget. Generally, under-estimate income and over-estimate expenses! Then, stick to your budget and track expenses through regular review. You must operate this as a business if you are going to succeed. Even if making money is a low priority, you don't want to break the organization. A good working budget will assist you and your committee on staying on track as questions arise. The budget is an extremely important guideline when a committee member approaches the chairman on what they can spend (e.g., do we have money for special signage? decorations?).

If possible, get budget documents from prior years to assist in developing your budget. This will help you estimate average expenditures per budget area, and may help you identify income or expense categories you may have missed. Look carefully at profitable years – what likely made them profitable? Likewise, look at years with a loss and think about what might have contributed to the loss - were there some unusual expenses, lower than anticipated attendance, etc.?

## PROMOTING YOUR FESTIVAL

Your festival is only as successful as the number of dancers who attend! Promotion is everyone's responsibility, whether on the festival committee or not. Talk it up, write it up, and talk it up some more! It's never too early and never too late to promote your event.

### ADVERTISING

The best advertisement is still "word of mouth". You need to have your committee visible in your local community and at neighboring festivals, and your promotional materials readily available. Carry a theme throughout your materials (such as specific colors, logo or picture, etc.); this will help to "brand" or provide recognition to your festival. Be sure to take a careful look at your material to assure that they give potential attendees the information they need –location, dates, registration costs, type of dancing, calling and cueing staff, hotel and RV arrangements, etc. Ask your contracted calling and cueing staff for photos and bios to include in your materials.

### Flyers, flyers, and more flyers:

- Print full and half page flyers as well as registration forms to distribute at local dances and at other festivals.
- Develop a network of dancers who are willing to assist with the distribution of flyers.
- Provide plenty of flyers to club and association leaders to put out at their activities.
- Provide flyers to your local callers and cuers as well as your featured staff.
- Ask local square dance shops and the vendors that are coming to your event if they will display your flyers.
- Keep a few folded flyers in your pocket ready to hand out when folks ask about the event.
- Distribute electronic versions of your flyers through club and association e-mail lists.

Display Board: Develop a promotional display board (such as a typical “science fair” tri-fold). Include your festival’s date, location, calling and cueing staff, and any special activities. Take it to special dances and festivals around your region and state. Have plenty of registration forms to put on the table with your display. Don’t forget to ask prior to assuming you can put up a board – some dances have limited space.

Registration Table: Request a table at special dances in your area as well as at other festivals around the state/region to sell registration ribbons. (Be sure to offer the same at your festival for others!)

Website: Create an inviting and informative website for your festival. Include all necessary details about location, calling and cueing staff, registration costs and timelines, hotel and RV options, etc. Add some photos of your facility and area attractions. Include registration forms to be printed and mailed or submitted electronically; offer online registration if you have the capability. Be sure to display the website address prominently in your print materials; consider including a QR code in this age of smart phones.

Press/media releases: Local media generally will not bring out additional dancers but is a great way to promote square dancing in general. Keep your press release short and to-the-point; be sure to include all the essential information about your event as well as any “hook” that might attract attention from your local media.

A few other promotional ideas include:

- Wear your festival outfit and/or your badge everywhere you dance – this attracts inquiries about your event.
- Ask your local calling and cueing staff, as well as your featured staff, to announce your festival regularly at their dances. (And, of course, have your staff announce other upcoming festivals from the stage during your dances.)
- Provide tickets to your festival for other festivals to use as door prizes (fashion show or enhancement fund drawings).
- Purchase or trade ads in regional dance publications (see next section).
- Contact free online listings of dances and festivals and ask to have your festival included in their service (such as wheresthedance.com).
- Try some GIMMICKS, such as a mascot that can be readily associated with the festival or a fun activity such as a scavenger hunt or car rally.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

There are a number of square dance-related publications that can help you promote your event, some for free and some at a fee. The California Square Dance Council has a list of approved publications that will sell you advertising space for your festival. Contact each publication for current ad prices and policy on inserting flyers. Some publications may trade ad space in their publication for an ad of similar value for their festival in your local publication. Some publications will insert your flyers into their publications for a small fee. Flyers in the center of a publication or on the back cover have high visibility and may only cost a little more.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING AROUND YOU?

There are many festivals around the state and even in nearby states that can affect your event. Some are sponsored by other state-affiliated associations, others by local clubs or other organizations, and some are caller-run festivals. There is an annual Festival Calendar published on the California Square Dance Council website ([www.squaredance.org](http://www.squaredance.org)) and distributed to each affiliate. It lists each festival or anniversary dance sponsored by a Council-affiliated association, including the date, location, calling and cueing staff, and contact information. Other good sources of festival information include websites such as Where's the Dance ([www.wheresthedance.com](http://www.wheresthedance.com)).

These other festivals can help or hinder your event, depending on when they are scheduled, their featured staff, the nature of their facility, and other considerations. It is generally best to not schedule your festival on top of a similar event, particularly one in close proximity, as likely both will suffer.

Use other festivals to support your own event by:

- Displaying a promotional display board (such as a typical "science fair" tri-fold) that includes your festival's date, location, calling and cueing staff, and any special activities. Have plenty of registration forms to put on the table with your display.
- Requesting a table or booth at special dances in your area as well as at other festivals around the state/region to sell registration ribbons. (Be sure to offer the same at your festival for others!)
- Checking on featured callers and cuers procured by other festivals. Even the most popular callers and cuers can be "over-exposed" if calling at too many festivals or dances within an area or a specific time frame.

## STAFF AND PROGRAMMING

### CALLING AND CUEING STAFF

The type and quality of callers and cuers you choose depends again on your festival's purpose. While many festivals try to include one or more "outside" callers, remember that a "local" caller to you may be a "festival" caller to a dancer from outside of your area. You must decide who will draw from your area and surrounding areas. Some associations have developed Caller / Cuer Procurement Committees to work on staffing for future festivals. Others develop their festival committee in sufficient time to choose their own staff. Remember that many callers and cuers book three to four years in advance, so the sooner you decide on your staff the better chance you have to get your preferred callers and cuers.

Other considerations when choosing your staff:

- If using three or more callers, consider using different cost levels of callers (possibly a "1" and "2" who would be a larger draw and might require higher contract fees, and then a "3" that would be lower price range). Be sure to consider all aspects of the cost including their fee as well as any provisions you make for travel arrangements, hotel accommodations, etc.
- Vet your callers and cuers. Don't assume everyone can call or cue at all the levels you are offering. Ask for references from other festivals – did they show up on time, did dancers enjoy dancing to them, what level(s) were they most comfortable calling, etc.
- Ask your callers and cuers who they prefer to work with. A good chemistry amongst the staff will lead to a more enjoyable festival for the dancers.
- Check with the other associations and regional festivals to see who they have for callers and cuers. Too much overlap may not be good even if the callers are excellent.

## CONTRACTS

Carefully consider what you put into your staff contracts. The contract should include the main fee as well as any additional items you are offering (such as hotel rooms or travel reimbursement). The contract may provide an estimated number of hours you are asking the staff to call/cue but be careful not to limit yourself. You should have a clause in the contract that allows either party to terminate the contract within some designated period of time before the event (usually anywhere from 30 to 90 days). This allows you to renegotiate contracts or eliminate personnel as the need arises. There should also be a space on the contract where caller/cuer puts his/her BMI / ASCAP license number.

Other considerations when preparing your contracts:

- Be specific regarding any terms related to travel arrangements. For example, is it only one airfare or two (especially when dealing with round dance cuers); must they book their flight early enough to take advantage of advanced fares; what city are you anticipating them to fly out of and/or into; is car rental included, etc.
- If you want your calling and cueing staff to arrive by a specific time and/or not to leave before a specific time, be sure to state it in the contract.
- If you are concerned about your staff calling or cueing in close proximity to your event, you may include a clause in your contract that they not call within so many miles for a set number of days prior to or after your event.
- Be sure that any special needs or requirements are defined in the contract, and not left to recollection of a conversation.

## PROGRAMMING

You need to have an idea of the numbers of each dancer type (e.g., square, round, contra, clogging) and level (e.g., mainstream/plus/advanced, Phase 2-3 rounds vs. Phase 4-6 rounds) that may attend your festival. If possible, review data from prior years not only on overall attendance, but on hall attendance at different times during the festival. (If your festival has not previously collected this information, check with other festivals and consider collecting it for the future.) Assess the cost of each potential hall to determine how many and which ones you can afford to support.

Consider when certain types of dancers are most likely to show up. For example, will mainstream or plus dancers come at 10:00 A.M. Saturday morning for a regular session or would that be a better time for a workshop or round dance teach? Will you have enough dancers for an after party? Should you combine halls/levels for Sunday morning? In programming your staff, consider:

- How much you expect each one to call/cue across the days of the festival.
- Which level(s) each one is best suited to call or cue (e.g., some callers may excel at mainstream and plus but be less comfortable at advanced; some cuers may attract higher level round dancers while others are best with phase 2-3).
- Which callers you might want to pair up for some sessions, and with whom they are most comfortable being on a program. Callers have different types of charisma or stage presence; some "play well" with others while others may not really "jell" with one another.

## FACILITIES

### TYPES OF FACILITIES

Procuring an appropriate facility for a reasonable cost is sometimes one of the greatest challenges for an organization sponsoring a festival. You will need to balance the number of halls / amount of space you need with the costs to rent the facility (including costs for halls, tables / chairs, flooring, RV parking spaces, and so on). You will need a separate hall or area for each type and level of dancing (e.g., advanced, plus, mainstream, rounds, handicapables), an area for registration, a hall or area for vendors if you have them, and smaller rooms for hospitality and security (caller/cuer equipment, treasurer). You may also need to designate areas (either within dance halls or in separate rooms) for activities such as a fashion show, exhibitions, or educational programs. Don't forget about areas or tables for flyers and promotional displays from other associations and events. Some of the places you might consider include:

**FAIRGROUNDS:** Fairgrounds usually have several large halls available as well as plentiful parking and even RV facilities. Rental prices vary since each fairground is an individual organization and their taxes and costs are different. Charges may include hall rental, table and chair rental, stage rental, custodial services, security services, and so on. Make sure that you obtain a list of their standard charges before you begin negotiations. You may also want to check with other events that have used the facility to see what they have paid. Most fairground halls have concrete floors; some are in better shape for dancing than others, so be sure to look at each hall you are considering renting.

**HOTELS:** If you are thinking of holding your festival in a hotel, there are a few things that you should investigate. First, check many hotels for the number and size of halls, and the associated costs for each; type of flooring (many hotel halls are carpeted or have only a small dance floor); whether the hotel will "bundle" hotel rooms with hall rental for more reasonable rates and/or block hotel rooms at a special rate for dancers who stay at the hotel. Check with the local Convention & Visitors' Bureau – sometimes they have a process to solicit bids from hotels based on your specifications. Also, check on parking costs – if parking is not free, the management may be willing to give your dancers a special daily or weekend rate. Finally, consider where you will put RV's – is there a nearby facility, preferably within walking distance, or can you recommend local campgrounds?

**PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES, COMMUNITY CENTERS, AND THE LIKE:** Many festivals, especially smaller ones, have been able to use local park and recreation facilities, community centers, or senior centers. They may have fewer halls (e.g., only 2-3 of sufficient size), but may also have very reasonable rental rates especially for non-profit organizations.

No matter which facility you choose:

- Be sure you understand the facility contracts completely: what is included, what is not included, what are you responsible for, and any special considerations. When in doubt ask!
- Make sure everything you discuss verbally is included in writing. Management often changes and new staff may not know or agree to items you discussed previously.
- Check in with your facility often to identify any changes in staff and monitor any changes in the facility itself (e.g., needed maintenance, planned renovations, etc.)
- Ask whether the facility is likely to double book other events on the grounds, and how that might affect your festival. Noise, traffic, and security are all areas to consider.

## SOUND

Good sound is essential for good dancing – if dancers can't hear clearly, then squares break down and dancing is no fun. Most festivals contract with a sound vendor experienced with square and round dance events. Contractors may be individuals or organizations; some Caller and Cuer Associations may also do sound contracting for dance events. Make sure your sound contract specifies the number, size, and layout of halls to be "sounded"; the anticipated number of dancers or squares in each hall; the hours for dancing in each hall; set-up and break-down times; any special equipment to be provided such as hearing enhancement; and any special provisions for the contractor such as registration ribbons, hotel rooms, or RV parking. You may also wish to include what you require and expect as response time should sound issues arise during the event. Finally, make sure you have cell phone or walkie-talkie communication with your sound staff throughout the event so any issues can be addressed promptly.

## FLOORING

Another major consideration associated with the facility is the type of flooring. For many dancers, the quality of the floor can make or break the event. Dancers with tired, hurting feet from dancing on concrete, or twisted ankles or knees from a sticky floor, are not happy festival attendees! There are many types of floors available at the various facilities used for these events. You need to evaluate each floor type for the various dancing activities at your event (e.g., square dancing, round dancing, clogging, etc.). Generally, the round dance program enjoys a little slicker floor than the square dancers and the square dancers can handle a stickier floor than the round dancers; the cloggers do not want it very slippery at all! Check with your program chairman as to the requirements of the floors for the events being planned.

**Concrete:** Most fairgrounds (and many other facilities) still have concrete floors that are quite suitable for our activity. You need to check on the slickness of the concrete. If the floors have been polished and waxed, they can be too slick and are dangerous. If they are too rough, they are not good dance floors and can actually tear up shoes quite rapidly. Also, be on the lookout for large cracks, electrical connections and other items in the floors that could be tripping hazards. Some have used duct tape to cover them, and this works to a point, but duct tape is also somewhat of a tripping hazard since it is much coarser than concrete. You might try the Wrestling Mat Tape (mentioned below in Hardwood Covering). Again, checking with the management in advance will give you a better idea of the options you have.

**Wood:** If you are lucky enough to have wood floors, congratulations! Dancers generally love hardwood surfaces. However, make sure you check on the maintenance of the floor. There is nothing worse than a beautiful wood floor that is so dirty and sticky it is not suitable for dancing. Verify that the floor will be clean, waxed and not coated with the sticky plastic coating that some locations use. Here again, the surface should be smooth but not too slick! Make sure the management knows what you need and check it out well before the event. Good wood floors are such a plus for square and round dancing that, if you are fortunate to have this at your venue, be sure to include this information in your promotional materials.

**Swiss Trax Flooring:** Swiss Trax (or similar) floor panels have become increasingly popular. They provide a cushioned floor with a good dancing surface. The individual pieces are 12" squares that are connected together into 3' x 3' squares. These larger squares are stacked together in pallets. The flooring is relatively easy to lay down and can be adapted to fit any size room. It can be laid over concrete or carpet. Edging pieces are available if the floor is not laid wall to wall. A good source in California and other Southwest states is Swiss Trax Flooring, based in Las Vegas, NV and Indio, CA. They will usually provide a special rate for square dancers. The flooring can be picked up from them or shipped to your facility.

**Hardwood Covering:** Another method that has been used to cover carpet is hardwood 4' x 8' panels. The panels can be purchased from a local wood store and delivered to the festival site. Your organization can lay the wood and tape the panels together. Some of the lessons learned are shared below:

- There are several types of wood that can be purchased: hardwood panels in thickness of 1/8" or 1/4", and tempered or high tempered. If you are planning to use the wood again, the 1/4" high tempered hardwood is recommended. The thinner pieces may break more easily (especially on uneven floors), and the low tempered hardwood does not withstand the heavy traffic of dancing nor the removal of tape.
- The tape used is the most crucial item. It is "Wrestling Mat Tape" and is a 4" vinyl tape with good adhesive that will not tear and roll when it is punctured.
- If the carpet does not have long pile, put a piece of plastic (Visquine) between the wood and the carpet. The wood floor will tend to move with the direction of the pile. Sometimes it will move up to three feet during a three-day festival because of the dance motion and pile interaction with the wood. The movement of this wood will happen no matter what you try to do to stop it. Other pieces of wood as well as chairs have been damaged when in the way of the moving wood. So, put a barrier between the wood and carpet or allow sufficient movement area around the floor.
- Use a "herring bone" pattern to layout the floor leaving space around the edges of the room. Make sure that the edges of the wood panels line up across the floor. Even though the tape is good, the wood is stronger and it should break up the separation forces.
- Leave enough room between pieces of the wood for minor expansion (about 1/4"). The wood will expand with the higher humidity of the dancers and if they are too close together, the floor will buckle. Also, store the wood in the same environment as the dancing area (e.g., if the room is air conditioned, store the wood in air conditioning to get the humidity out of it).
- If the wood is being delivered to the dance location, allow a few days for the wood to settle and be conditioned. Most lumber stores place the hardwood on two 2x4's so that it can easily be lifted with a forklift. This means that the wood will warp slightly and need time to lie flat so that the warping will settle out. Otherwise, it is quite difficult to lay the floor, and much more movement of the floor will take place after it is laid, which is always a problem.

**Parquet Floor Covering:** Commercial wood floors normally are 3' x 3' sections that slide together and lock with a set screw. They are very nice when done correctly, but can be a headache when short cuts are taken. First, remember that facilities do not understand our concept of "wall to wall" dancing. They normally will set tables or chairs around a floor, and you lose three to four feet all around the hall. They also do not understand our "High Energy" dancing and will not always lock the sections together. Sometimes the locking screws break and they don't repair them, or perhaps they do not schedule enough time to install the floor correctly. You also need to assure that the edgings are installed, especially in high traffic areas. These edgings are the wedges that keep people from tripping as they go from carpet to wood. As mentioned earlier, talk carefully with the maintenance department and determine when the floor is being installed, how it is to be done, and then assign someone to check it periodically through the weekend. If you plan to rent a floor, the same concerns need to be addressed.

There are many products that can be used to "speed-up" a floor, including wax flakes, soap, corn meal, and other commercial products. It is suggested that these items be used in test locations before being applied to the whole floor as their results may be slicker than anticipated or of little use, depending on the floor that you are trying to correct. Be sure to obtain permission from the management of the facility to use a product on their floors; by not obtaining prior approval, you may find yourself responsible for payment of a refinishing job after the dance! The best results come from working with the management of the center before your event to test the floor and discuss the problems with their maintenance department to see if they can correct the problem. Sometimes they try too hard and you may find the problem reversed – from too sticky to too slick. Trial and error is the best method, so set up a time well in advance of the event to discuss, test, and re-test.

## SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Many festivals like to add special activities within the festival program. These allow dancers an opportunity to rest their feet while enjoying another activity. Some popular activities include:

### OPENING CEREMONIES / GRAND MARCH

Most festivals dedicate a time (usually Saturday evening) for an opening ceremony. This serves as an opportunity to formally welcome the dancers and thank them for coming, recognize the festival committee, introduce the calling and cueing staff, and accomplish any other announcements. Components of an opening ceremony may include:

- Master of Ceremonies: A good MC is important to your opening ceremony. You need someone with a good voice that commands attention, who will keep the event moving along (e.g., is not too wordy or long-winded!), and will make sure all the important welcomes and announcements are handled in an organized and timely manner.
- Grand March: If the festival attendance is sufficient then a grand march is a fun way to kick off the opening ceremony. Participants line up outside a main hall in groups and parade in to march music. The master of ceremonies usually announces each group as they enter the hall. Generally, the state or local association officers lead the grand march, followed by dancers grouped by their clubs within their associations or geographic regions. The festival committee may enter first or last.

The march usually begins with the participants in lines of four (although this may vary depending on your space. As the four-abreast column marches down the center of the hall, each set of dancers is directed at the head of the hall to alternate peeling left and right around the outside of the space. Once the complete group has entered and split around the outside into two columns, the columns meet and march again down the center in lines of eight. The groups of eight then split (if space allows) to circle the perimeter one more time, joining for a final column of 16 dancers down the middle. If there is to be a presentation of colors (see below), then the column will split in the middle and move slightly to each side to open a center aisle.

- Flag Ceremony: Most festivals include the Pledge of Allegiance and singing of the National Anthem as part of the opening ceremony. Some choose to include a color guard presenting the flag; these may be solicited from local organizations such as the Boy or Girl Scouts, high school or college ROTC, military station, or a veterans' organization. The Pledge of Allegiance may be led by the Master of Ceremonies, the General chairman, or another identified participant. The National Anthem may be sung by a dancer, one of the calling staff, or a local singer.
- Welcome and Thank You's: The Master of Ceremonies or the chairman will usually welcome all the dancers and thank them for attending. The chairman will publicly thank the committee members for helping put on a successful event; this may include just a general thank you or introduction of the committee chairs by name. At a minimum, the committee is usually invited to come to the front of the hall to be recognized.
- Announcements: The president of the local or state association may be asked to say a few words, and often the chairman for the subsequent year's festival is asked to speak briefly. Other special words might include things such as an "In Memoriam" moment of silence for dancers lost during the past year, announcement of awards such as a "Dancer of the Year," and so on. Generally, other announcements should be kept to a minimum to reduce the amount of time dancers are standing or sitting around without dancing!

- Introduction of Staff and First Dance Tip: The opening ceremony generally ends with introduction of the event's calling and cueing staff. (Staff should be informed in advance if they are expected to be in the hall for introductions.) At this point, the Master of Ceremonies will usually turn the microphone over to the callers for the first square dance tip of the evening. This first tip should be called at the floor level (generally mainstream).

## **EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS**

Yes, square dancing can be educational! Many conventions and festivals include short educational presentations as another option for dancers. Seminars or panels may explore square dance-related topics such as recruiting new dancers, club leadership, advertising square dancing using media/social media, dancer insurance, and so on. Presentations may also address non-dance topics such as financial planning or gardening! Educational sessions are generally about 60 minutes, and good sessions usually combine a presentation with time for discussion or Q & A.

Schedule your educational sessions at times when dancers are likely to want a break or to have alternative choices. Don't schedule them against your most popular sessions (e.g., an all-singing call hour by a featured caller or a special activity such as hex dancing). Advertise, advertise and then advertise your educational programs some more. There is nothing more disappointing than having an outstanding presentation that no one attends.

## **EXHIBITIONS**

Another way to offer dancers a break is to schedule exhibitions. These may take place throughout the day, during breaks in the evening dance program, or before an evening ceremony. The California Heritage Dancers and similar groups are often interested in traveling to and performing at festivals and conventions within California as well as around the country. Staff round dance callers and line dance teachers also frequently like to perform a "Showcase" highlighting specially choreographed routines. There may also be local exhibition groups such as cloggers or dance teams that are interested in performing.

Check with your exhibition group contacts to see that you have the necessary sound equipment. Also, consider where and when you schedule the exhibitions – is it a time when dancers are likely to be around to watch? Does the hall have plenty of space? Are there enough chairs or standing room for the audience? Finally, just like the Educational Sessions, make sure to advertise, advertise and then advertise some more.

## **FASHION SHOW**

Many dancers still enjoy a Fashion Show. Some festivals choose to keep the Fashion Show to more traditional square dance dress while others have added models showing the range of attire frequently accepted in today's square and round dance world (such as prairie skirts for ladies, round dance outfits, club shirts, other western wear). Many Fashion Shows are organized around a theme while some simply invite dancers to model favorite outfits. Your festival can also assist in the promotion of the State Convention as well as other festivals by inviting their chairman or representatives to model the convention or festival outfit. The key to a successful Fashion Show is to have enough models but not too many, and to have a narrator who is upbeat and interesting to listen to. The commentary is important – attendees can see the outfits, so unending detail is not necessary. Good commentary usually includes a few unique highlights about the outfit(s) along with a couple of interesting tidbits about the models themselves.

Fashion shows typically run from 45 to 60 minutes – too short, and it’s not worth the dancers’ time; too long, people will leave. Saturday around lunch is a good time for a Fashion Show; dancers are ready for a break and you are not interrupting major dance sessions. Entertainment interspersed with modeling, door prizes, or other activities can break up the show and interest more people. Vendors will often donate door prizes, and some will allow a local dancer to model their clothing (and sometimes buy the outfit for a discounted price).

Plan ahead. Many festivals start soliciting models well in advance. Request all of the information needed for commentary in advance, including the description of the outfit (design, fabric, accessories, seamstress or vendor, unique features or circumstances, etc.) and information about the model(s). Be sure to confirm your models a few days before the event. Let them know when and where they need to gather; whether they need to come dressed or if a dressing room is available; what the order/line-up will be, etc. If you are having trouble locating models for the fashion show, it may be time to consider whether the fashion show concept is viable for your event.

### **SEWING OR “MAKE-IT/TAKE-IT” ROOM**

Given the economy coupled with a diminishing number of square dance vendors, many dancers like to make their own dance attire and/or accessories. A Sewing Room can be as simple as having patterns and experienced seamstresses available informally, to scheduling formal presentations on how to make particular types of clothing or accessories. Sewing Room hosts sometimes collect door prizes from vendors or dancers to give away to those visiting the sewing room or attending particular presentations.

Some festivals have added to or replaced a sewing room with a “make-it/take-it” room. Here, dancers could make patterns, create accessories, enjoy some crafts, or engage in other fun, hands-on experiences.

## **THIS AND THAT: WHAT ELSE MIGHT I NEED TO KNOW AND DO?**

### **FUND-RAISING ACTIVITIES**

There are a variety of activities you might consider to boost income for your festival. These include:

- Raffles for special prizes or “split the pot” ticket sales (where dancers buy tickets for a share of the money collected). Be sure to check IRS regulations as well as state tax codes as some may affect how you handle these types of activities.
- Auctions such as a silent auction (where bidders write in bids for individual prizes) or a “Chinese” auction (where attendees buy a strip of tickets and drop them in a cup associated with a prize they are interested in). Associations or clubs may donate prize baskets, and prizes can also be solicited from local businesses and attractions.
- Advertisements through a program book or advertising board. Ads can be solicited from local clubs to promote party nights or anniversary dances, from other associations or conventions, from callers and cuers, and from local businesses. Ads can help underwrite the costs of printing a program book (which then serves to provide the dance schedule, highlight special events or activities, offer bios for the calling and cueing staff, and provide a place to thank your committee). Display boards or lighted advertising signs could also be placed in prominent locations (as long as it does not distract the dancers or the calling/cueing staff).
- Grants are under-explored and often overlooked opportunities to support square dancing. Check with places such as the Convention and Visitors Bureau, large trade and/or union organizations, Chamber of Commerce, or merchant associations on what might be available in your area. Also, depending on your event’s purpose, medical facilities and insurance companies may have grant opportunities available.

## VENDORS

Dancers generally love to shop! Traditional square dance vendors are always popular (clothing, shoes, badges, belts and accessories), but don't rule out non-traditional vendors as well. Check with the major square dance vendors as well as local small businesses. Even dancers who do crafts or homemade jewelry may be interested in renting a booth.

Many of the major vendors will only attend if your registration reaches a high-enough number that they feel will be worth their while. When contacting vendors, be sure to be honest about your anticipated attendance, the nature of their location within the dance facility, and so on. Some vendors will request non-competition clauses in the contract (for example, a clothing vendor that prefers to be the sole clothing provider at your festival). This is something to consider especially if you want to attract a prominent vendor. It is generally good practice to not overbook a particular type of vendor; this allows vendors an opportunity to generate income so that they will want to be a part of your event in future years.

Set your vendor booth size as well as rental prices to be attractive but also profitable for you. Spaces are typically 8'x10' or 10'x10'. Common charges range from \$50 to \$100 per space (note that some vendors may rent more than one space). Consider whether you are being charged by your facility for tables and chairs, and ensure your price covers that. Be sure to have a vendor contract that specifies the size and cost of the vendor booths; the number of tables and chairs included in the booth rental (and the cost for any additional ones); the required deposit amount and time frame for refunds if cancelled; hours for sales, set-up, and break-down; cancellation policies (on both sides – the festival and the vendor); loading and unloading locations; and parking information (including parking fees, RV spaces, etc.). You may also consider asking your vendors if they would be willing to provide a prize (such as a merchandise item or gift certificate) for the raffle or silent auction.

Note that the IRS has ruled that the income from vendor contracts is earned and must be so claimed on your association's income tax return.

## FOOD AND WATER

Dancers need lots of water and plenty of food options. Next to dancing, our dancers love to eat!

**Water:** Check with your facility regarding requirements and options for water. Some facilities may require you contract with them or a designated supplier, while others will allow you to provide your own. As a rule of thumb, you need one or more large water jugs in each dance hall with plenty of cups and a trash can. Small disposable cups are best, but if you have a table available you may also consider paper, plastic, or Styrofoam cups with marking pens available for dancers to write their names or initials. Make sure you designate someone on your committee to monitor the water in order to fill jugs and replace cups as needed.

**Food:** It's great if you can have some type of food on-site. Dancers hate to take any more time than they have to away from dancing. Again, check with your facility regarding requirements and options for food. Some facilities will set up special service such as buffet lines or boxed lunches; others may provide discounts for on-site restaurants or kiosks. If your facility allows, you may also contract with a local provider for lunches or dinner. If you are doing your own or a contract food service, consider how you will sell tickets – will there be an order option on your registration form? Can dancers buy tickets at the door, and if so how much advance notice is required? Will you provide/order extra for walk-ins? Set your prices to cover all costs (including food, beverages, serving utensils, napkins, and the like) and maybe even net a small surplus to help cover overall festival costs.

## INSURANCE

To assure that your festival is protected from lawsuits and to provide protection for the dancers coming to it, make sure that insurance coverage is provided. The California Square Dance Council (CASDC) participates in the dancer insurance program provided through the United Square Dancers of America (USDA). If your event is sponsored by an association that is part of the CASDC, heed the following steps. Even if you have a different carrier, the steps should be similar:

- Certificates of insurance need to be ordered early. It is recommended that you order your insurance certificate at least six months prior to your festival. You will have to specify all individual halls/spaces that are being used if you are not using the entire facility. Be sure to request the exact wording that the facility requires. Have the facility type up their requirements on their letterhead. Have a copy of your insurance certificate available during your event should you need to provide it to someone asking for proof of insurance.
- To protect your association (and your dancers) from lawsuits, obtain claim forms before the event. Have them available at the festival and have someone familiar with the forms to assist if an accident does occur. If an accident should occur, gather all the data and submit the Accident Report Form to your Association Insurance chairman within 72 hours of the accident. If the injured party does not submit an insurance claim, the insurance company will disregard the accident report, so be sure to fill out the notification and forward it anyway, even if the dancer swears that no claim will be filed. The insurance company will refuse the claim if one is filed later and your Accident Report Form is not on file.
- RVs are not insured. Only the dancer is insured while walking to and from the RV. Caution your wagon master about doing or promising too much for an RV as you don't want to open the festival/association up to liability. RV owners should be responsible for their own parking and set up.
- Vendor supplied food is not covered, however festival activities (breakfasts, etc.) are covered. Please note that some insurance coverage may be voided if alcohol is sold or served at the event.

## HOSPITALITY ROOM AND SECURED STORAGE

Most festivals provide some type of hospitality room. At a minimum, the hospitality room can provide a place for callers and cuers to take a break and get a snack. Sometimes these hospitality rooms are also open to "VIPs" such as committee members, board members, and/or other state or association presidents. A few festivals have open hospitality rooms for all dancers to drop in for a snack. In planning your festival, consider what room you might be able to use for hospitality, and what your policy will be on who can visit the hospitality room. Be sure to post the policy outside the hospitality room (nicely worded, of course) so everyone knows who and what it is for. The hospitality room usually provides a variety of "finger food" snacks (crackers and cheese, chips and dip, nachos, veggies and fruit trays, cookies) along with some type of drinks such as water, coffee, lemonade. If your hospitality room is open to all, you may want to consider strategically placing a donation "kitty" or two.

Callers and cuers usually need a relatively secure space to keep their equipment when they are not calling. This could be a separate locked room or an area blocked off and guarded by designated dancers/committee members. The treasurer may also need a secured area to handle money when preparing cash for deposit or writing checks for reimbursement.

## **BMI / ASCAP**

Local festivals are generally covered under the Callerlab and Round-A-Lab agreements with BMI and ASCAP. Therefore, if you have licensed callers and cuers, your festival does not need additional contracts with either BMI or ASCAP. If you have a caller or callers that do not have the BMI / ASCAP license, then as the promoter of the festival you are responsible for obtaining your own contract. However, if you have a licensed caller in the hall at all times then his license covers the others. There should be a line on your caller and cuer contracts where they provide their BMI / ASCAP license number.

If you have live music you will need additional contracts with either BMI or ASCAP. The rates vary yearly, but normally there is a minimum for the contract or a price per dancer.

Please note that it is UNLAWFUL to hold any dance that does not have a BMI / ASCAP license. The fines are quite high!

### **WANT TO MAKE A DRASTIC CHANGE?**

Many festivals have been run the same way in the same place at the same time for many years. For a lot of organizations, they've found a successful combination and there's no reason to change it! However, if your festival is faltering then you may want to consider a change. What is a major change? Changes may include staffing or programming, dance levels, date, location, theme, or more. Here are a few types of changes:

- Staffing, such as moving from using many local callers to contracting with a few featured callers.
- Type/level of dancing, such as a major reduction in round dancing or an increase in higher-level dancing such as advanced and challenge.
- Location, from simply moving to a new facility (such as changing from fairgrounds to a hotel) or moving to a new area or town.
- Date/time of year, like changing from a fall festival to a spring-time weekend.
- Downsizing, such as changing from a three-day festival to a one-day event, or changing from four different levels of dance halls to just one or two.

Before making a major change, look at data you have collected from both your own festival, over multiple years, to other festivals in your area or state. You may want to see whether festivals with local callers are doing better or worse than those with featured/national callers. You may want to track which halls/levels have larger or smaller numbers of dancers, either overall or at specific times. You may need to look at a cost/benefit analysis, such as how much your halls are costing compared to your number of dancers.

Be very careful in making major changes to your festival. There are times when major changes have to be made but keep in mind that many people – whether within your association or outside of it – do not really like change and may not be supportive. You may need to go slow to go fast – solicit ideas and opinions, get dancers from throughout your association invested in the festival and the need for change, keep people informed and involved. As a rule of thumb, it takes at least three years to recover from any major change. In other words, attendance may drop for up to three years before it returns to where it was prior to the change or even gets better. If your festival is in a bad situation now and you make a major change, the whole organization must be behind the change for any hope of recovery. This means that a major selling job must take place to get you back to the place where you started. If you really have to make a major change, then you may want to consider a new name and theme for your festival. This way, the people who have not supported you in the past may look at this as a new festival, and those that have always supported you do not expect the same type of festival. This helps eliminate disappointment.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

### **PLAN FOR THE UNKNOWN!**

Do your best to think about possible contingencies and make back-up plans. What will you do if a caller or cuer cancels or doesn't show up? What are you going to do if it rains and you have outside activities? What will you do if the power goes out? Who do you call if your halls aren't opened on time? These are just a few of the things to think about in advance – plan for the best, but prepare for the worst!

### **DURING THE EVENT**

**Who's in Charge:** There should be a key person available at the festival at all times to answer questions. This is probably the General chairman, but there should be one or two others identified as well. The information or registration table should be able to contact the designated person(s) at any time throughout the event. There is nothing more frustrating to volunteers or dancers than to hear "we don't know," or "we'll have to wait until the chairman arrives to get an answer."

**Announcements from the Stage:** Generally, your participants are there to dance and don't want to hear a lot of talking. However, you may wish to have some brief announcements made from the stage – just make sure they are replicated across all of the halls as appropriate. These might involve reminders about special activities or your silent auction, cut-off times for food or raffle tickets, "heads-up" calls when educational program sessions or other events are about to start, and – towards the end of your festival – promotion of early bird or pre-registration prices for the next year's event. If you are asking callers or cuers to make these announcements, be sure to give them the information in writing so the details will be correct and consistent from hall to hall.

**Data Collection:** You may want to ask your committee members to collect some data during the event. Important information for future festivals includes:

- **Hall counts:** You may wish to record counts of the number of dancers in your halls at different times of the day and for different types of events. For example, how many dancers are in each hall first thing Saturday morning? How many dancers showed up for the plus workshop or the hex hour or the phase 5-6 round dance teach? How many dancers were in the hall when Joe Blow called vs. Jane Doe?
- **Peak times for door registration:** Knowing when dancers show up to register at the door will help subsequent festivals plan appropriately for the number of volunteers and forms they need at different times of the day and weekend.
- **Participation in special events and activities:** Ask your educational program hosts, your exhibition chairs, your fashion show and sewing room coordinators, and others to record attendance at each session. This could be done via sign-in sheets or a simple tabulation chart.

### **AFTER THE EVENT**

Fairly soon after your event ends, you will want to arrange a wrap-up meeting and conduct an evaluation process. This should take place soon enough that folks don't forget what happened, but after the majority of your final budget figures are available. Generally, each committee chair should develop a brief written report summarizing their areas of responsibility, what went well, what issues arose, and what might be done the same or differently the next time. These can be compiled and provided to the next year's committee as well as maintained as a cumulative record. At a wrap-up meeting, have each committee chair share their findings, discuss the "plusses" and "minuses", and make recommendations for the next year.

## CONCLUSION

You are well on your way to a successful event! In conclusion, here are just a few more thoughts ...

- Know where to get help and who to call! Reach out to other festival chairman or former chairman, as well as your local and state associations. Square dancers are a great group of people who are generally more than happy to answer questions and share knowledge.
- Enjoy your Festival! Keep up on the details no matter how large or small, but don't forget to also have fun. Dancers, callers and cuers, vendors, and everyone else around will notice if you are relaxed and the festival is running smoothly.