

Report from the CDSS Governing Board

Contributed by board members Nancy Barbour (NJ), Dorcas Hand (TX), and John Seto (CA)

The current CDSS Governing Board consists of 22 individuals from 15 states plus Washington, DC. Members come from all regions of our country, and include representatives from contra, English country dance, ritual/morris, song, LGBTQ, and non-white communities. 2017 was a critical year as we underwent several important transitions, including a not-quite-yet (but almost) complete upgrade of office technology systems from many separate tools to one integrated structure; consideration of budget issues and systems in light of consultant insights; and most importantly, the selection of our new Executive Director along with several staff changes.

Now at the end of the year, CDSS has met these challenges with grace and determination. And we are stronger because of them. The tech efforts are moving toward integration and testing, with confidence in better efficiency and compatibility. The Board is stepping up to model giving as a CDSS core principle by agreeing to raise \$25K. Most important of all, our work from October 2016 until summer to define the job description for the new Executive Director has led us to the ideal candidate. We are thrilled that Katy German is already beginning to take us in positive and new directions. We thank everyone who carried this work forward, specifically those in the ED Transition, Exec, and Fund Development committees.

How does a board spread across a continent get things done?

Glad you asked! While much of the work of Board committees is done via conference calls, face-to-face meetings bring the chance to engage at greater depth on many topics. The three official organizational meetings in 2017 included two Executive Committee meetings—February in Atlanta, and November in the Boston-area (specifically Sudbury). These meetings were open to the other Board members, and many were able to attend. In Atlanta, our focus was the ED transition, especially that pesky but all-important job description. We also appreciated extensive training and workshops to clarify roles and responsibilities of staff, ED, and Board—important relationships critical to the health of any non-profit organization. And we worked to understand and potentially implement better decision-making models.



The CDSS Governing Board listens as treasurer Craig Meltzner (CA) makes a presentation at the Annual Meeting in Amherst, MA. (Photo by Doug Plummer)

The Annual Governing Meeting takes place every April in Western Massachusetts, and is the main event for board members. The 2017 Annual Meeting opened with a song of spring from outgoing Board member John Mayberry (Toronto), which helped us connect with each other and to the broader community that we serve. This year we welcomed Tom Colligan as interim Executive Director, new business manager Melissa McCullen, and three new board members: Peter Baker (MI), Susie Lorand (MI) and Beverly Francis (NJ), who are just beginning their 3-year terms. As Beverly noted, “It was interesting to be in a room of dance and music enthusiasts from all over the US and Canada. Quite a range of heartfelt points of view were expressed on the topics before the Board. I was impressed by how the Board made its way through the thickets of procedure and policy and differences of opinion. And it was great to be part of a board that includes songs and dances on its meeting agenda!” New Board member Peter Baker (MI) “enjoyed the willingness of the Board to listen to each other and engage in a constructive dialogue.”

The Annual Meeting affords an important opportunity for Board members and staff to interact face-to-face, and this year we applied the speed-dating concept to small group discussions on Education & Outreach with Pat MacPherson, Salesforce transition and store operations

with Sarah Pilzer and Lynn Nichols, Advocacy and Development with Robin Hayden, and Camps with Steve Howe. In addition, a primary area of focus for this year was to hire and transition to a new Executive Director. The Transition Task Group, led by board member Doug Plummer (WA) mobilized quickly to hire an interim Executive Director, and then focused on the search and hiring process to find the next leader for CDSS.

This year the Board has also set a goal to continue to build skills as individuals and as a collective governing body, focusing time at each board meeting on continuing education and learning. We focused in 2017 on financial stewardship and development, with training and activities led by Director of Development Robin Hayden and Board member David Shewmaker (DC). One enlightening exercise was a sharing of testimonials from individual Board members—what roles do dance, music, and song play in our lives, how has the mission of CDSS been impactful to us, why do we serve on the Board, and why is CDSS worthy of support? Through the sharing of our individual stories, we learned more about each other and were inspired by the messages of community, sharing, family, growth, making a difference to others, and the importance of those who have maintained the traditions and the facilities that allow us to keep moving forward.

We all believe strongly in the mission of CDSS and are committed to serving the organization and its members. In October in Sudbury, we welcomed Katy to her first meeting as ED, to lead us as we began to focus on strategic planning, and as we pick up threads of work left static until there was a new ED in place. Katy brought some key staff members to join in a special session to kick off strategic planning. After a year of diligent work and patience, it was gratifying to feel the energy and excitement in the room as we got to work.

Why do we travel around so much?

We believe that a core function of the Board is to build connections with and represent our affiliate dance communities all across North America. In order to do that, it's important to spend quality time with folks—dance, sing, eat, and share ideas together. We are continually impressed by the graciousness of local hosts who extend their warm hospitality, share their talents in music, song, and dance, and share with us insights, current challenges, and unique characteristics about their

home communities. In many cases, it's a rare opportunity for representatives from several dance, music, and song traditions to gather in one place for focused conversation on what unites them. Through these traveling meetings our Board keeps a finger on the pulse of the wide CDSS community as it spreads across North America. We gain important feedback from the community meetings which were well attended in both Atlanta and in Sudbury, and we love to dance and sing with our larger community! Atlanta offered a contra one night and an English dance the other; Boston offered a contra on Thursday for those who arrived in time, and two English dances on Friday and Saturday. We will be in San Diego this February, and deciding soon where to visit in Fall 2018 and beyond.

What's on the horizon?

In the coming months we'll be announcing our new Board members, including our next Board President. We'll also be diving into strategic planning by evaluating our strengths, capabilities, challenges, and gaps that we face as an organization, factoring in the changes emerging in the external landscape, and defining the strategic priorities that we need to address in order to meet the future needs of CDSS members and communities. This is an exciting time for CDSS, and the Board and staff are looking forward to working together to chart out the future of this wonderful organization.

For more information about the CDSS Governing Board, go to www.cdss.org/about-us/governing-board.



President David Millstone (NH) shares a laugh with board member Pam Paulson (WI) at the Executive Meeting in Atlanta. (Photo by Doug Plummer)