

Long Bouts of Thinking and Then a Dance or Song: CDSS Board Meeting 2016

by Hannah Shira Naiman and Pam Paulson

It's early in the morning—the sun is shining, and for the first time in a long while, you can feel the warmth of the sun on your skin. In the parking lot at Eastworks, in Easthampton, MA, one by one, sleepy-eyed folks are emerging from their cars, clutching their travel mugs, and heading inquisitively towards the entrance. Some are more inquisitive than others—namely the nine new CDSS board members who are setting foot in the building for the very first time. Through the large glass doors, and past the bustling coffee shop, we bunch up in front of the elevator...and wait...and wait...and wait. When the elevator finally arrives, we are slowly lifted up to the third floor. Next we trod down winding halls and past many offices, and around the final bend we come to the CDSS office, a room overflowing with friendly faces...

We began our meeting on Wednesday at the CDSS office where the new board members had a chance to meet each other, the returning board members, and the staff. As with many diverse groups that come together we found that we had many things in common beyond our passion for the mission of CDSS and participatory arts. As we looked around the table, it was clear that some of the programs that CDSS has sponsored in the past are coming full circle. Rima Dael, Executive Director, proudly pointed out, "During 'New Leaders Good Leaders,' we invested in young folks and our next generation leaders—two of those young people were Katy German and Sarah Pilzer. CDSS is reaping the rewards sown from that investment by welcoming Katy in her role as a board member, full of nonprofit acumen, and Sarah, on staff, full of her programmatic, sales and data expertise."

On Thursday and Friday we moved to Amherst to meet at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst in a beautiful, sunny room, perfect for brewing bright ideas, and tackling tough questions. Our meetings began at 9 am, and for two days, throughout the sunlit hours, we huddled together, tackled difficult issues, and brought forward important questions.

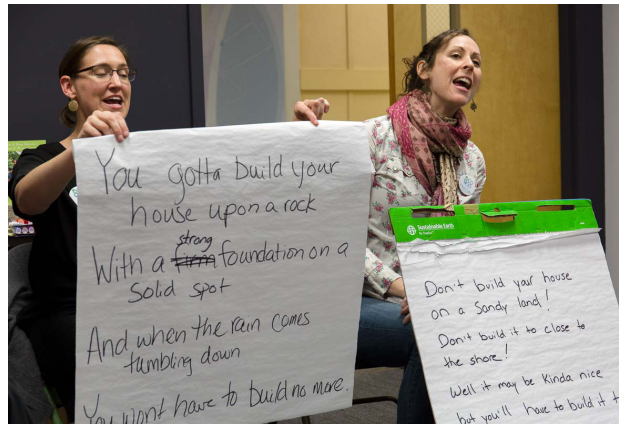
Strategic thinking or "Questioning" is truly the heart of what the CDSS Board does

The Board has a fiduciary responsibility to the organization, and as a result spent most of Thursday morning analyzing and discussing financial reports to better understand CDSS's financial position. Craig Meltzner, Treasurer; Bob Blondin, Business Manager; and Rima Dael prepared and delivered the reports to the Board. This point in the meeting was particularly interesting, as it comes in the afterglow of the announcement of the Sage Foundation grant. This \$1,000,000 grant, to be delivered in \$200,000 installments over the next five years, is a

monumental opportunity. The extraordinary gift—the largest in CDSS's history—will allow us to fully pursue the goals of the Centennial campaign. This year, it will allow us to invest in long overdue technology and infrastructure upgrades. Perhaps most significantly, as the five-year pledge is fulfilled, it will allow us to build a substantial operational reserve. The funds raised from Spread

the Joy Centennial campaign and the remainder of the Sage Foundation grant are not to be used for ongoing annual expenses. These funds are earmarked for organizational investments. The Board and CDSS staff are discussing the best ways to prioritize and make use of these gifts so that it is truly transformational for CDSS.

At the same time, we are dealing with a common issue in many participatory arts organizations: a longstanding structural deficit in our annual operations that will take time and care to overcome. Phrased succinctly, in recent years, we spent more than we earned, which is not sustainable. In different years over the past ten years, the deficit was masked by large one-time gifts to the organization. The Board provided broad guidance to Rima and the Finance Committee on how best to tackle this problem, and a smaller group of board and staff will offer specific solutions.



photos by Doug Plummer

We heard reports from all of the board committees and task groups. Lorraine Hammond, chair of the Song Task Group, passionately shared her report on the group's work, focusing on 2016's "Year of Song" theme. We were reminded that "Song" was only added to our name relatively recently, in 1962, and has become an integral part of our mission. The Task Group is organizing an American Song Symposium in November [see p. 32], and Lorraine is spearheading "The Song of The Month" on cdss.org—be sure to have a look at this month's selection!

Steve Howe, Director of Camp Programs, led us through this summer's roster of the ten diverse weeks offered this year. Camp income is a major contributor to the CDSS budget, and the CDSS staff works year round to successfully plan and execute its programs. There have been ongoing discussions over the past years and at our recent meeting on different models of camp programming that CDSS may change or pilot.

Also of active discussion with CDSS Board and staff has been the two-year turnaround plan for Early Music Week. CDSS's Camp Advisory Group and the Early Music Week advisors have worked with Steve and Rima for the past two years to increase camp enrollment and reinvigorate programming for the week. During Early Music Week this year, a small environmental group working on local trails in Plymouth will be joining the camp. They will participate in evening activities. During the day they will be off-site working on the trails near Pinewoods Camp. Ongoing planning for Early Music Week continues to determine the future sustainability of this week.

Check the CDSS website for up to date information on space availability at all CDSS Camp weeks: <http://www.cdss.org/programs/dance-music-song-camps/camp-weeks>.

Throughout our meeting, after long bouts of hard thinking, we made sure to enjoy the very things that bring us together: song and dance. We stretched our legs with a quick contra dance after lunch on Thursday, with music by Natty Smith, Doug Plummer and Martha Edwards, and calling by Frannie Marr. The meeting began with a song and ended in song: we stood in the beautiful, resonant chapel, with arms linked, and voices raised in a song of hope for bright days to come.

We are grateful to our departing board members for their time, passion, and dedication to this great organization. And, while we bid farewell to them, we'll leave you with a few words from some of our newest members. Thanks for reading along—stay tuned for a great year.

WEB EXTRAS! Photos of the Board meeting, <http://www.cdss.org/programs/cdss-news-publications/cdss-news>, plus photos of the February 2016 Exec Committee meeting in Victoria, BC.

NOTE: Minutes of the 2016 CDSS Governing Board meeting will be posted on our website as soon as they are approved.

New Board members speak out:

JOHN SETO: Old Chinese adage: "When drinking water, consider its source..." California is as far from the origin of American and English country song and dance as anywhere. It is therefore important that we acknowledge our foundation began in New England. CDSS has served as surrogate for hundreds of organizations in its 100 year history. It is both an honor and a privilege to serve to continue CDSS' mission to spread the joy in dance and songs.



HANNAH NAIMAN: I feel like I've been given the secret pass code to Oz. This is an amazing organization because of all the folks behind the curtain, spinning the wheels and shining the lights. I learned what an endowment is! I never thought I cared until now. I'm excited to be a part of the discussion as CDSS embarks on a new phase of its existence, one that has the support of a huge number of dancers and singers across North America. As part of the Song Task Force, I'm also excited for the American Song Symposium under Lorraine Hammond's contagious and enthusiastic direction!



FRANNIE MARR: It was great to meet all the wonderful folks who are so dedicated to CDSS. I'm excited to bring more awareness of CDSS to the western parts of the country.



KATY HEINE: CDSS is in excellent hands with this board of ferociously intelligent and deeply dedicated members. I feel honored to be among them.



NANCY BARBOUR: I see a tremendous passion among all of the board members for the community of dance, music and song, and a commitment to do all that we can to continue to advance the mission of CDSS. I am looking forward to serving on the Executive.



Other new Board members are Chris Weiler, David Roodman, Katy German and Norm Stewart.