

CDSS Supports Local Communities in Addressing Safety

by Diane Silver and Nikki Herbst for the CDSS Community Culture and Safety Task Group

In response to many requests for resources on the topic of safety at local dance events, the CDSS Board has established a Community Culture and Safety Task Group. The task group aims to support local communities in their efforts to provide a safe environment for music, song, and dance events.

As CDSS, we are not prescriptive in regards to what your community “should be doing.” We recognize and value the range of living traditions practiced by our communities. Rather, we are working to provide advice and support by collecting thoughts and documents from across the U.S. and Canada and synthesizing them into a coherent set of resources. We hope this will make it easier for local organizers to understand and facilitate safety, to develop the policies, procedures, and supporting documents needed, and to discuss controversial topics productively when they arise. We welcome input from local organizers and dancers who have worked on these issues.

So far, the task group has identified five areas of concern that affect safety in all its aspects at the local level, all of which can be addressed in documents comprising what we are calling a Safety Structure. We recommend that communities develop a statement of community values, a code of conduct, courtesy & etiquette guidelines, complaint response procedures, and a checklist of things to consider for the physical venue (such as ADA accessibility, trip hazards, decibel level, emergency medical procedures, etc.). Having these documents in place can help prevent problems in the first place, provide tools to nip problems in the bud before they become big issues, and address larger problems as needed.

We aim to support communities in developing these elements by a) organizing/creating a clearinghouse of existing literature, training, and other resources for each one, and b) vetting existing materials to create a toolkit of exemplars, from which local leaders may easily copy and paste (or edit) more efficiently than plowing through the entire clearinghouse of samples and discussions. We hope the toolkit will ease the process of writing these documents at the local level by providing a flow and sequence (outline or format) for each document, as well as a manageable batch of sample language from other communities.

We had a web chat in July 2019 to introduce this work and start a discussion, and we have released a first draft of the toolkit on the topic of Courtesy and Etiquette (Shaping Culture). These are both available on the CDSS Organizers Resource Portal cdss.org/webchats. We chose Courtesy and Etiquette as our first topic because it is the one for which the most work has already been done by music, song, and dance communities, and it seems to be the item that is most wished for by communities addressing safety for the first time.

Next we will work on a toolkit for developing a Statement of Community Values, as that is what drives (or informs) the other elements. Ideally, a community should first determine what their community values are, and then use them to guide development of the other elements. toolkits for Code of Conduct, Handling Complaints, and The Venue will follow in the future, as well as tips and resources for facilitating discussion of controversial topics (e.g., selection of terminology, declining a dance, enforcing a group’s code of conduct).

There is already a good deal of information on the CDSS organizers’ portal, although it’s a lot to look through, which is why the task group hopes to simplify this process. In the meantime, there are many good ideas ready for you to explore at cdss.org/topics. You may find *Community Culture: Event feel, inclusivity, and more* and *Community Safety and Etiquette* to be of special interest. As we develop the Clearinghouse, we will reorganize these materials to fit into the categories of the recommended Safety Structure described above.

There have also been some good discussions on the Shared Weight listserv. To subscribe to the organizer list, visit www.sharedweight.net. We will be reviewing past discussions and pulling out the salient points from this list and other social media postings as part of our work.

We hope this growing set of resources will be helpful to local communities that are working to address safety. We welcome input from communities who have already made good progress and are willing to share their experience and wisdom. Please email the Community Culture and Safety Task Group: cdss.safetyTG@gmail.com.