

Finding a Hall

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Finding a space that is appropriate for your type of music or dance event or group can be a real challenge. A good space in a good location can contribute considerably towards making an event successful. Here are some tips on how to find the right hall, and how to make sure you can continue to use it for the long term.

START YOUR SEARCH

Start by casting a wide net in your community. Survey all sorts of community organizations to see if their facilities include a dance hall or Rec room that might work. A good first place to start is the local Chamber of Commerce; they may have a list of all rentable spaces in town with information about rates and availability. Here are some ideas for groups or organizations that might have useful spaces available:

- Fraternal organizations (VFW, Shriners, Elks, etc.)
- YMCAs and YWCAs
- Community centers, Senior centers, Recreation centers
- Health clubs or Dance studios
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Schools or colleges
- Churches
- Town Halls or municipal buildings
- Granges

As you evaluate different spaces, keep in mind that no hall will meet all of your criteria. Decide on the most important criteria based on your vision for your event/group. Here are some things to consider when evaluating a hall:

- A good floor: Bring your dance shoes and try doing your dance style on the floor. See how it feels. In some areas dancers are very picky about floors; elsewhere it may not matter as much. Look for a smooth surface, preferably wood with an even finish (unfinished wood can be great too), a reasonable amount of spring or give when you jump or balance, a manageable amount of dust, a good balance of stick vs. slide for your style, and relatively little slope.
- Parking and/or proximity to public transportation
- Reasonable rent
- Availability, condition, location and usability of a piano in the hall
- Adequate, clean restrooms
- Availability of a kitchen and dining and social space, especially if you serve refreshments or hold a potluck with your event.
- Receptive and friendly owners and/or building managers
- Willingness to allow recurring reservations (e.g. every second Saturday)
- Easy access for sound gear and performers' equipment
- Handicapped accessibility
- Good ventilation or air conditioning (especially for contra dancing)
- Appropriate size (too big and your event will feel empty, too small and you'll be bouncing off the walls)
- Good acoustics
- Pleasant, welcoming atmosphere
- Proximity to people you hope to attract
- Low chance of getting struck by lightning (that actually happened to a dance hall in Brattleboro, but luckily we were able to continue dancing there. No, it didn't happen during the dance)

[At the bottom of this document is a] sample Dance Hall Checklist created by Joyce Crouch to evaluate possible halls for a single day English dance event with possible potluck or catered meal. You can create a similar form based on your particular needs. Joyce recommends the following when visiting halls:

Draw maps of the shape and layout of the hall. This helps to jog your memory later

Visit the hall with several people; one person can chat with the building manager, while others are exploring different parts of the hall. This also helps the manager or owner to get to know your group personally.

RENTING THE HALL

When you have found a good option, explain your event or group to the building owners. Emphasize that you are putting on an open community activity that will attract people to their facility and potentially give them more visibility in the community. Talk about the historical and traditional aspects of what you are doing. Tell them you're not making any money doing this, it's just really fun. Invite them to come check out what you do free of charge. Offer to hold one event and see how it goes before they book you for a series. If the building owner is rude or uninterested from the beginning, you're probably going to have a tough time in the long run; you might consider another venue.

Find out from the building owners or landlords if they require renters to have insurance, and if they need to be listed as a named insured on the policy. More information about CDSS group insurance is available [here](#).

OTHER STUFF

If you have a space that you are in danger of losing because of recalcitrant landlords, offer to bring your community in to help with clean up days or painting or light maintenance. This is a good way to give back, but more importantly, for the landlord to get to know your group.

Sometimes groups lose their halls and have to move. This can seem like a disaster, but it is not insurmountable. People come to your events because of the music, the dancing, community, the social scene, and the fun of the activities, not the hall. A series can transfer these things to a new hall and continue to thrive.

Some dance and music communities have invested tremendous energy in community-owned or community-maintained spaces, which ultimately strengthens the whole community. Some examples: the Guiding Star Grange in Greenfield, MA; Tapestry Folk Dance Center in Minneapolis, MN; the Capitol City Grange in Montpelier, VT. Consider rallying your community for a long-term project to create the space that would be perfect for you.

Dance Hall Information
(created by Joyce Crouch and the Amherst English Dance committee)

1. Name of Hall _____ Location/Addr _____

2. Contact Phone _____ Contact Name _____

3. Cost of Hall _____ per hour; _____ per event

4. Type of Floor _____ Condition _____ Size of Hall _____

5. Piano? - (Yes) (No) Usable? (Yes) (No) (Maybe)

Location _____

Condition _____

Last time tuned _____

Tuner's name & Phone # _____

Who pays for tuning? _____ cost of tuning _____

5. Stage? (Yes) (No) _____

6. Kitchen facilities? _____

7. Dining facilities, tables, etc _____

8. Other Info or Quirks (acoustics, cleanliness, etc) _____

9. Hours available for inspection: _____

At the Hall Inspection:

1) Measure actual dance space (draw shape) _____

2) Est # longways sets _____ Est # dancers/lw set _____

3) Try piano

4) Go in restrooms